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Stowaway Dick Abroad.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.



STRAIGHT AS AN ARROW RODE THE GUIDE, FOLLOWING THE FAINT TRACK AS EASILY AS THOUGH
IT WERE A TRODDEN ROAD.

Stowaway Dick Abroad ;

OR,

THE DESERT ROVER.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "DICK, THE STOWAWAY," "HONEST
"HARRY," "LAME TIM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD SALT'S YARN.

THE hot Egyptian sun poured its scorching rays on the desert sands of the world-famous isthmus of Suez. Everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, to north and south, spread out the glistening sands, without a green leaf or a rising hill to break the arid level. But here, in a course straight as an arrow's flight, ran a broad river eastward across the desert. It was the mighty Suez Canal, the band that joined two oceans into one, the water-way between the two hemispheres of the earth.

To the west this stream spread out into a lake-like expanse, Lake Menzoleh, one of the ancient water-basins which the flood of the canal had filled. But this scene, formerly given to solitude, the ancient desert pathway between Egypt and Palestine, was now alive with men, and astir with human interest.

On the waters of the lake floated a fleet of great vessels; some of them huge steamers; others clad in steel, and showing the yawning jaws of the dogs of war. Above them all floated in broad folds the proud flag of England. It was an English war fleet, for the first time in all history, anchored in the heart of the desert.

On shore was as much life as on the waters. The white tents of a great camp stretched along the sandy border of the lake. Thousands of soldiers were visible, some engaged in cooking their meals, others attending to their horses or to the artillery, many stretched in listless idleness beneath the shade of the tents, all free from the sharp exercise of the drill.

There was a peculiar air of satisfaction about these men, a look of joy and hilarity, which bore in it the tale of victory. It was indeed the victorious army of England, returned from the conquest of Egypt, and yet thrilled with the memory of that one desperate early morning charge, which had utterly broken the Egyptian lines and scattered their defeated troops over the desert like the beads from a broken string.

The conquest of Egypt was one of the few cases in the history of the world in which a war was ended in a single battle, and a mighty rebellion quenched in one great blow.

On the edge of the canal, near where it joined the lake, sat a group of men, under the shadow of the sand-hill which bordered the stream.

One of them was a weather-beaten old sailor, with a face as rough as an oak log, and a frame that seemed as tough as hickory. The smell of the salt seas hung about him, as if he had been blown upon by every breeze of the spreading oceans. The very set of the cap on his frizzled hair no landsman could have counterfeited.

Beside him sat a youthful figure; a mere boy,

in fact, but a boy who looked quite able to make his own way in the world. There was about him a don't-care-a-cent air of independence, and a look of readiness for any emergency, that could only have been born in America. In his reckless, happy-go-lucky expression and the free poise of his head, it was evident that he felt himself the equal of any of the kings of Europe, and quite ready to flaunt the Stars and Stripes of the land of freedom in the face of the proudest of them.

These two personages we have met before. The boy was Dick Dareall, "Dick the Stowaway" of a former story. The sailor was Bob Backstay. They had been, as our readers must know, through the stirring events of the Egyptian war, and had now accompanied the victorious army back to the fleet of transports, ready to embark for the shores of Merry England.

There were several other persons in the group. Mr. Pearson, Dick's English uncle, one or two other officers, and a sailor, as bronzed as old Bob himself, who seemed to have landed from some vessel of the fleet. The tents of a regiment stretched out from the point on which they were grouped.

"Shiver my timbers, but it does my old bones good to see ye!" cried Bob, shaking the hand of the sailor with as much energy as though he was working a pump-handle. "Bill Short hey? as I've sailed with from York to Hong Kong. Blast my toplights, but it's a cure for the rheumatics to see yer jolly face! And where've ye been, Bill, since we shook company on the old Juniper?"

"Reefing round the world," answered the other. "Been in all sarvices, from a whaleman to a man-o'-war. Been wrecked among the Australian niggers, and flung high and dry on the African sands."

"Hillo!" cried Bob, "that brings me back to my eggs. I've struck the log-book of memory now. You left York on the old Sumter, as was wrecked on the African coast, and never brung her moldy bones back to harbor."

"You're right there, Bob. I were six blessed months 'mong the east coast niggers that bout afore I got off ag'in."

"See here, Bill," cried the old tar, in much excitement, "there were a messmate o' mine aboard that craft, as prime a sailor as ever tied reef-knot. Jist look in yer log, and see if the name of Dave Dareall isn't jotted down there!"

"Jolly Dave! Why, he floated ashore on the same log with me, and was nabbed by the same bloody crew of niggers!"

The boy, who had been listening carelessly to their conversation, straightened himself up at this, while a look of ardent interest marked his intelligent face.

"You don't mean to say as he got off with you?" asked Bob, in some excitement. "He ain't aboard the fleet yonder?"

"Nary time. Hadn't the luck I had. I left him among the niggers."

Dick, the boy, at this sprung excitedly forward, and firmly clutched the speaker's arm, earnestly crying out:

"You left him! Why did you leave him? Where is he now?"

The sailor looked around in some surprise and

anger, as he jerked his arm loose from the boy's hard grip.

"See here, you little thrippeny plaything, what in the hurricane— Hey, by the blazes, where did ye git that nose?"

He ceased, and sat looking with astonishment at the excited boy.

"Only that Dave Dareall must be as dried-up an old coon as me, I'd swear them was *his* nose and eyes!"

"So they are," answered Bob Backstay. "It's a chip of the old block afore ye, Bill. This here boy is Dave's son."

"Thunder and blitzen! Let me look at him!" He caught Dick by both arms and drew him within a foot of his face, while he eagerly scanned the intelligent features of the lad.

"It's him, over ag'in," he at length said, with a long-drawn breath. "To think of old Dave's son turning up here, on these dry sands of Egypt."

"Tell me 'bout my father," queried Dick. "Is he alive or dead?"

"Yes," broke in Mr. Pearson, the English officer. "You were shipwrecked and a prisoner with him, you say. How did you escape? And what was his fate?"

"I was took off by a Yankee man-o'-war," answered the sailor, respectfully. "They'd heered of the wreck of the Sumter, and how some of the crew was held by the niggers. But afore this happened Dave and Joe Blaker had guv the darkies leg-bail, and streaked off north. I was took and brung back, lucky for me. But *they* got clean away."

"And you know nothing further about them?"

"I ain't said that," answered Bill. "There's more ways nor one o' gitting at things. Why, it were only last year as I come sudden afoul o' Joe Blaker, aboard a tea merchant in the Chiny seas."

"And my daddy with him?" cried Dick, eagerly. "Wasn't my daddy with him?"

"I'd say yes, if it weren't fur lying, my boy," answered the tar. "I'm obleeged to say as Joe left your daddy behind. But it's quite likely he's alive yit."

"Go on with your story," demanded Mr. Pearson. "Keep quiet, Richard. You will learn your father's fate sooner that way."

Dick sat down at this reproof, though it was evident from his face that he was boiling with suppressed eagerness and excitement. And old Bob seemed little less aroused to interest.

"Well, then," began Bill, "'cording to Joe's yarn they had a jolly old tramp, arter gitting away from the niggers. They made the'r way to Abyssinia, which is a mighty rough country fur white folks, though 'tain't so bad since our English lads licked old King Theodore out of his boots. Well, Dave and Joe stayed there some years 'mong the black haythens, when they got a chance to jine some Arab traders. These took 'em 'cross the straits, and on to the sandy sile of Arabia. That brung 'em 'mong a sort o' half-an'-half white men, but a bloody ugly crowd fur all that. The Arabs is all Mahomdans, you know, and hate Christians like they

isen."

true," answered Mr. Pearson. "Yet country than Africa."

"Well, they were handed around 'mong the copper-colored kings, or whatever they call the beggars. More nor once they come within an ace o' havin' their heads snipped off, fur Dave talked saucy to the hounds. Lucky they didn't understand our lingo well, and of'en took impudence fur compliments. Anyhow they was separated. Joe drifted to the coast, and struck a chance to make tracks; but he left his ship-mate 'mong the beggars."

"How long ago was this?" asked Mr. Pearson.

"A good two year and more back."

"Then he may be held prisoner among them yet?"

"Quite likely. Dave Dareall had a reg'lar gen'us fur tumblin' on his feet."

"Something must be done. The English ambassador, and the consuls to Arabia, must be notified," remarked Mr. Pearson. "He must be rescued."

Dick sprung to his feet, his young face blazing with determination.

"I wouldn't guv a row o' pins fur all them there flunkies 'll do," he cried. "I'm a-goin' myself to hunt my daddy. It's a big country, folks say, and I ain't much of a pattern. But I've got pluck, and that's better than muscle. You bet I'll find him!"

"You!" came in surprised exclamations.

"Yes, me!" answered Dick, resolutely.

"What do you say, Bob Backstay? We've been some 'mong the Bedouins. Guess we know somethin' o' the'r ways. Will you take another sand cruise with Dusty Dick arter his father?"

"I will, you plucky youngster, if it's to the end of the world," answered Bob, in a tone of resolution and admiration for his boy chum.

"You had best give up any such ridiculous idea, nephew," said Mr. Pearson, severely.

"You do not know what you are talking about, or what a perilous undertaking you would attempt."

"I know, anyhow, that my daddy's a prisoner somewhere in that sea of sand," answered the determined boy. "I'm a-goin' fur him if I have to crawl on my hands and knees. Don't be scared 'bout me and old Bob. We know somethin' 'bout the Arab ways, and kin spout a bit o' their lingo. You bet we pull through all right, uncle."

"What do you say, Bob?" asked Mr. Pearson, doubtfully.

"The boy's plan is the only one," answered the old tar. "You mought as well send word to the Emperor of Chiny as to the British Ambassador. It won't be my first trip to the sandy kingdom."

"I trust the boy to you, then," answered Mr. Pearson. "You cannot go without money, but I will supply you with that. May luck attend you."

"I've heered that work and pluck makes luck," answered Dick. "Guess Bob and me has got them."

CHAPTER II.

ON A FALSE TRAIL.

ACROSS the desert, many long leagues away from the position of the English camp, moved

three camels. They were of the best breed, the dromedary, the ship of the desert, no more like the ordinary camel than the thoroughbred is like the cart-horse. Under the hot rays of the desert sun they moved with wonderful speed, darting over the barren sands with a long stride that told wonderfully on distance.

Two of them were ridden by our two friends, Bob Backstay and Dick Dareall. The third, the one in advance, was ridden by an Arab, a genuine son of the desert. Naked from the waist up, his bronzed skin shone like polished brass, while his long black hair fell in tresses far below his shoulders. His sharp, expressive features were set off with gleaming white teeth, and eyes that shone like glistening stars.

Around his head was a handkerchief of bright colors. Before him on the saddle lay a long matchlock, ornamented with silver, coral, and mother-of-pearl. In his leathern girdle was thrust a dangerous-looking curved poniard, the *djembe* of the desert. Altogether he looked like a perilous customer.

But the two who rode behind him were not unarmed. Each of them carried a rifle on his saddle, and a brace of revolvers in his belt. Old Bob besides had his broad-bladed ship-knife thrust in its leathern sheath. They were prepared for rough work.

"See here, my boy," said the old salt cautiously to his companion. "I don't quite like that chap. We've been for days now on the sands and there's not the shadow of a caravan to be seen. He was to overhaul it long before this."

"S'pose we call up the feller, and pump him a bit," suggested Dick.

"Ay, ay! That's my notion. And if the hound's playin' it on us shoot me if I don't keel-haul him fur a copper-colored nigger. They're a tricky crew, the hull on 'em."

A shrill whistle from Dick caused the guide to look back. At a signal he checked the speed of his camel, until they came up.

"You go for him, Bob," suggested Dick. "You're a reg'lar old coon at slingin' Arab. Fetch him up short."

"See here, my pretty," exclaimed the old sailor, in very fair Arabian, "you said as that caravan hadn't six hours headway on us, and we'd forge up on it afore night. Now blast me if here isn't another night, and nary a bit o' driftwood from the fleet ahead. Durn your top-lights, if ye're a-tryin' to salt us—"

"It's open sand here," interrupted the Arab, waving his hand significantly. "No water; no meat. The caravan has hurried on to the wells. We will overtake it in the early morning."

"How do you know that?" cried Dick, who had picked up some inkling of the language.

"The Arabs have eyes and ears," answered the guide briefly. "You strangers are blind and deaf. Follow me, if you will. If not, lead on; I will follow you."

"You lie, you hound!" growled Bob in English. "Look here, Hassan, there's not a drink around left in our water-skins. I've been dry as a mackerel these six hours, and afeared to gobble the last drink. How soon will we fetch up on water?"

"Follow me," came the brief reply.

"Follow Old Nick!" growled Bob. "I think we'd best follow our noses."

"It's all sand, sand," cried Dick, pushing up to the guide. "All sand and sky. How's a feller to know right from left? Kin you smell out water?"

"Yes, at twenty leagues. Arabs have eyes, ears and noses. I am taking you to the water."

"That's too thin. Ther' ain't the leaf of a palm-tree in sight. My eyes ain't so bad. Show me your sign."

The Arab pointed to the desert sands at their feet. Dick looked down. There was nothing visible to him except a smooth, flat, glistening reach of gray sands, so fine that it raised like dust before every breath of wind.

"I don't see nothing," he declared.

The Arab smiled disdainfully as he continued to point downward.

"The eyes of an Arab are not the eyes of an infidel," he proudly remarked. "Water is level, but it has its ripples; sand is smooth, but it has its marks. You cannot see your face in it, as you could in a well."

"I see some little spots, like as somebody'd been dabbin' a walnut into the sand," returned the observant boy. "I don't calkerlate as they mean nothin'."

"They mean water," said the Arab, showing his teeth in a disdainful smile.

"How?" asked old Bob, incredulously.

"Look closer, and you will see that they were made by a hoof not larger than my thumb. They are the foot-marks of a gazelle. The animal has gone on in this direction."

"And what has that to do with findin' water?"

"A gazelle will find water where even an Arab would hunt it in vain. Follow. You shall see."

He pricked his dromedary behind the ear with the spiked cane he carried. The animal at once set off at a rapid pace across the desert, the long, slender legs swinging as if they had been hinged to the body.

The two friends followed, looking at one another significantly.

"Shoot me for a lubber, Dick, but there's summat to l'arn everywhere," growled the sailor. "That chap reads the sands jist like we'd read a book."

"He's got the whole jography of the desert under his noddle," answered Dick.

Straight as an arrow rode the guide, following the faint track as easily as though it were a trodden road. Yet his followers had great difficulty to make out the faint foot-marks.

The sun was now rapidly lowering in the west. The intense heat of midday was much alleviated. A few miles further, and they could see a hill-like elevation just showing itself in the south. Still on they rode. The camels now seemed to smell water ahead, and trotted on with redoubled speed. It was not very agreeable traveling, for the hard, wooden saddle of a camel needs the leathern hide of an Arab to ride on in comfort.

Hassan now turned back, displaying his teeth in a smile of triumph, as he pointed onward. The hill had risen till it showed itself to be a

rocky elevation of more than a hundred feet in height. A dim show of distant green appeared at its foot, the sure indication of water. They pressed forward more rapidly still, eager for rest and a cool draught.

A half-hour's ride brought them to the foot of the hill. It was a rugged mass of sandstone, rising abruptly from the plain, an outlier probably of a ridge of hills further south. Its foot was lined with a green border, from the midst of which a fresh spring gurgled up, and ran away in a fertilizing stream until its waters were swallowed by the thirsty sands.

In a moment the travelers had sprung to the ground, and ran eagerly with their caps to the refreshing fountain, from which they quaffed long draughts of the cooling waters. The dromedaries ran as eagerly forward, to quench their thirst at the flowing stream.

The sun was now near the horizon. Hassan occupied himself in setting the light camel's-hair tent, which had been carried on one of the animals. A central pole was planted upright in the ground, over which was flung the felted tent-stuff, its edges being drawn tensely outward, and fastened to pegs driven into the sand.

In less than ten minutes the tent was set, and the active Hassan had taken from his camel a wallet of provisions, consisting of small cakes, dried dates and rice, on which they made a frugal meal. The camels meanwhile were eagerly nibbling the grass which grew luxuriantly on the damp borders of the stream.

"It's jist prime," exclaimed Dick, smacking his lips. "I never thought as dry grub could taste so good."

"It's the desert appetite," answered Bob. "You wouldn't enjoy them sort o' rations in New York."

"Dunno 'bout that," rejoined Dick, shaking his head. "I've eat wuss. Had to grab and dig-out there, more nor once. When bizness was shy."

"You're far away from home now, my boy. Do you reckon on ever gitting back there ag'in?"

"Well, I'd smile if I didn't," answered Dick, with great energy. "Hope ye don't s'pose I'm goin' to bury myself in this played-out part o' the world! All this mought do fur a funeral, but Ameriky's the only place that's wuth livin' in. Don't take no stock in tais yere Europe and Afriky. Things is too much salted down here; they ain't lively."

"You may find 'em lively enough 'fore ye cast anchor ag'in in New York harbor. Ye're in the desert, but ye ain't through it yit."

"That's my style," answered Dick, energetically. "I'm alive fur fun, you bet. But I'd feel consid'able better if I could take a ten minutes' turn down the Bowery jist now.—Say, Hassan," he continued, in his broken Arabic, "what sort of a chunk o' rock is this lifting its nose outer the sand? It ought to guv a long look ahead. Wonder if we could sight the caravan from its top?"

"You might," answered Hassan briefly. "It gives a long look south."

He lay down on the sand as if he, for one, had no notion of climbing.

"I'm goin' to try it on then," cried Dick. "What say you, Bob Backstay?"

"It's worth a climb," replied the sailor.

A few words followed, after which the two friends rose and walked around the hill in search of an easier place of ascent. The evening gloom was gathering, and there was no time to spare.

Hassan lay like a bronze statue, not moving in a single muscle as they passed onward. But they had no sooner disappeared around a corner of the rock than he arose, warily followed them, and cautiously began to climb the steep hill by a more difficult passage than that they had taken.

Ignorant of this strange behavior of their guide, the two travelers ascended the hill by its easy western slope. Not far from the foot they passed a dark opening, half-hidden among the rocks, that looked like the mouth of a cavern.

"We'll dive in there on our way back," said Bob. "Looks like the hatchway to a ship's fo'castle."

A few minutes sufficed to bring them to the summit of the rocky hill.

As Hassan had said, it commanded a wide prospect to the south. But the evening gloom had now fallen over the distant landscape. Nothing living and moving was visible on the plain; but in the distance appeared the flanks of a range of hills, of which the mass they were on seemed the outlying termination.

"Nary caravan," said Dick, in a tone of disappointment.

"Let's streak down, and try the fo'castle hole afore dark," suggested Bob. "I'd like to see what's inside that there rock opening."

When they reached and entered the hole in question the gloom had thickened. They pushed some distance within, but in complete darkness. The floor seemed level and smooth, but, though they had gone twenty paces within, there was no trace of roof or sides.

"Let's git out," said Dick. "We mought flop into a sink-hole."

"I'm agreeable," answered the old tar. "Best try it ag'in by daylight."

They turned to retreat. But at the same instant a shrill whistle rung through the cave. Suddenly, as in a transformation scene on the stage, a row of men appeared across the opening, each with his matchlock aimed inward. At the same instant the entrapped travelers were seized by strong arms from behind, while the flash of a torch flared out, dispelling the darkness of the cavern.

Utterly taken by surprise they had become easily the prey of their assailants. But what was their surprise and anger to recognize in the torch-bearer the sharp eyes and treacherous face of their false guide, Hassan?

He had betrayed them into the hands of thieves or murderers.

CHAPTER III.

IN A TIGHT SCRAPE.

THE light of the torch, which flashed brightly through the cavern, revealed to the unlucky travelers walls of rugged rock, a sand-strewn floor, and a domed roof of about twenty feet in height.

They had no time or inclination to observe it more closely, for there still, in the narrow

mouth of the cave, stood three men, with leveled guns aimed upon them, while their arms were firmly held by two stalwart Arabs behind.

At the side stood Hassan, the light of the torch gleaming upon his bronzed skin, and revealing a malignant smile upon his treacherous countenance.

"Dern yer ugly top-lights!" exclaimed old Rob in a rage. "What's this about? What's these sky-blue cut-throats of highwaymen nabbed us for?"

As this was spoken in English it was wasted upon the Arabs, except from its angry tone. The old fellow gave a sailor's twist, and succeeded in wrenching one hand from his captor. In an instant he had drawn a pistol, and sent a bullet at the head of the treacherous guide.

The latter ducked hastily to avoid the shot. At the same moment the weapon was knocked from the hand of the furious old man, and a heavy blow fell upon his head, leveling him to the floor.

Dick had also made an effort to break loose from his powerful captor, but in vain. They were quickly bound hand and foot by the exulting Arabs, who made the cave resound with cries of triumph.

"Yell out yer throats, ye bloody thieving beggars!" grumbled the old man. "Ye ought to be proud of it, to snatch a man and a boy from behind, with an artillery squad drawn up afore 'em. Blame yer outlandish, copper-colored picters!"

"What does this mean?" asked Dick of the guide.

"It means that you have money, which we want, and camels, which we must have," answered Hassan, coolly.

"Ain't we paid you, square out, 'cording to contract?" queried the boy.

Without deigning to reply, Hassan made a sign to his companions, who at once took possession of the weapons of their prisoners. They then closely searched them, emptying their pockets, and removing the money belt which Dick wore.

This done they left the cave, paying not the slightest heed to the indignant questions of the betrayed captives.

The latter were left alone, in the gloom of the dark cavern, while a bitter dread crept through their souls at this seeming desertion to the fearful death of starvation.

"What do you think?" asked Dick, in boyish alarm. "Won't they come back?"

"I'm afeard not," answered Bob. "It's wuss nor a wreck on a desert coast. Are ye clewed up tight, Dick? Can't ye git a reef knot loose?"

"Nary time," answered Dick, vainly struggling with the cords that bit into his wrists.

"Wax isn't tighter nor I am."

"The dirty hyenas can't have the heart to leave us here to starve," cried the old man, writhing on the floor in a furious effort to break his bonds. "'Tain't so bad fur an old porpoise like me; but fur a spruce young chap like you, as is in your first cruise of life—"

"Don't you mind me," answered Dick bravely.

"I've never been much account, and I guess I won't be missed. But why couldn't they shoot

a chap, like Christians, 'stead of this heathen deviltry?"

"We're in a durned tight scrape," returned the old man. "But it's my motto to never say die. I've pulled through wuss holes nor this."

"That's the talk," cried Dick, with boyish hopefulness. "We won't giv up while there's a button holds."

They continued to debate the situation for half an hour longer. Meanwhile the sun had sunk in the west, and the dense darkness of the night had succeeded the short twilight.

The circle of half light which had marked the mouth of the cave disappeared, and a black gloom enveloped the whole scene. Despondency fell upon the souls of the prisoners as the chill of an October night crept in upon them with the darkness.

"Hist!" exclaimed Dick. "I hear voices!"

"Mebbe they're comin' back to finish ther job," growled the old man.

Ere more could be said the voices grew louder, and a light flashed into the mouth of the cave. It was followed by the appearance of several of the Arabs, one of them bearing a torch.

Hassan headed them, the same malignant smile still on his face. The two bound captives lay in silence, disdaining to ask for mercy from their traitor guide.

He walked up and gazed down upon them in bitter disdain.

"Do you know why I have left you here bound and helpless?" he asked. "You have kept your contract. You have treated me well. Would you know why I have betrayed you into the hands of the sons of the desert?"

"Because you're a dirty dog," answered the indignant old sailor. "Because you've got the shape of a man, and the heart of a hyena."

"I will tell you why," continued Hassan, not heeding this outburst. "It is because I hate your white skins. You were with the British army, that have slaughtered my countrymen, and helped the despots of Egypt. Thousands of Arabs have died by the guns of the strangers. My own brother has died. Do you know now why I seek revenge?"

"You're barkin' up the wrong tree," answered Dick. "We're no more Englishers than you are yerself. We're a pair of full-blooded Yankees; Americans; sound to the backbone; didn't pull a trigger on the Arabs."

"Americans!" queried Hassan, in a tone of surprise.

"You bet, and don't love the Englishers no more nor you do. We hail from New York, us two coons."

Hassan looked as if he did not quite understand Dick's Arab speech. He stood reflectively for a minute, and then stooped and drew a sharp knife across the bonds of the prisoners. They staggered to their feet, stiff with the long confinement.

Hassan signed to his companions, and a brace of matchlocks were aimed at the freed captives.

"Hold," he said in harsh tones. "As you are not English I will set you free. As you are white, and dogs of Christians, I will have an Arab's revenge."

"What deviltry is in yer cap now?" asked old Bob.

"Keep still, if you would live. A motion of my finger, and you will be pierced with bullets. Would you know your fate?"

Bob and Dick kept sullenly silent.

"You are free in the heart of the desert," continued the Arab, the same dark smile curving his lips. "We have your money, your provisions, your camels, your weapons. There is water at the foot of the rock. You can drink. There are gazelles in the desert, as swift-footed as the horses of Nedjed. You can run them down and eat. That is your fate, infidels. That is the revenge of Hassan, the Arab, on the murderers of his brother."

He turned to leave the cave.

"You black-mouthed hound!" roared the old sailor. "You've got your trick at the wheel now. But look out for the revenge of Bob Backstay, the Yankee tar!"

"Or of Dusty Dick, the New York bootblack," cried the boy.

Hassan turned and showed his teeth in reply.

"It is the jackal barking at the lion," he retorted. "There are the bones of many a camel bleaching on the desert sands. There will soon be the bones of two white men to keep them company."

He walked on, followed by his companions, without further heed to the two men consigned to a lingering death.

Dick sprung forward to follow, but he was firmly gripped by his comrade.

"Hold still, young'un," cried Bob. "Give the pirates a wake. We ain't got pistol nor rifle, and they'd shoot us quicker nor wink."

"Let us vamose this hole then," returned the shrewd boy. "They mought change their minds, and come back to make mince-meat on us."

"That's judgmatical," rejoined Bob, with an approving nod. "You've got a man's brains in a boy's noddle, Dick. Forge ahead, my hearty. This is the way out."

Hand in hand they groped their way to the entrance of the cave, revealed by a slight decrease in the darkness. Gaining the outside where the gloom was less intense, they made their way carefully up the flank of the hill. As they did so they caught occasional glimpses of lights at the foot of the acclivity, with momentary views of the Arabs as they moved to and fro among the camels.

These glimpses were only occasional, as the flank of the hill cut off their view of the camp except when a ravine opened toward it.

"What do you think of it all?" asked Bob, when they had at length attained the summit of the hill.

"They're gittin' ready to slide," answered Dick.

"Jist my notion. The brutes is goin' to leave us alone here, like two water-logged luggers adrift at sea."

"Anyhow their room's better nor their company," rejoined the boy.

They cast themselves down on the level summit of the hill. The clouds which had covered the heavens in the early evening were now dispelled, and the light of the stars shone brightly over the desert. In the far east a faint line of light marked the horizon. The dense gloom of

the early night was replaced by a faintly tempered darkness.

"Yonder comes the moon," exclaimed Bob. "It's goin' to be a glorious night. The desert moon is like a second-hand sun, my boys."

"I don't know as it'll light us to any good," answered Dick gloomily.

Louder sounds came up from below. There were heard the shrill cries of the camels. Then a shout from the men, that seemed intended to reach their ears. Other noises followed. The Arabs had set out, leaving their two victims alone in the desert. At the same moment the rim of the moon broke above the far-off horizon, in a curved line of silvery light.

The group of mounted Arabs soon came into sight, as they wound round the base of the hill, and the fast-rising moon threw its rays across the level desert.

They struck southward, almost directly toward the hills which lay in the distance in that direction.

The man and the boy looked at each other. The moon was now well above the horizon, and its clear light illumined the whole landscape.

"It's what I call a tight squeeze," declared Dick sententiously.

"I'd jist as lieve be floatin' in the center of the Pacific, without a rudder or a water-cask," echoed Bob.

"What's to be did?" asked the boy.

"That's an easy question; but ther' ain't no easy answer. We mought as well be jist born into the world, Dick, without nobody to look arter us. See here, boy, there's no use tryin' to hide the sitivation. Yonder's the desert, as stretches out for leagues to every point of the compass, and where a chap mought go 'round in circles fur a lifetime. And here's we, with nothin' left but our clothes. Nary a weepion, nor a mouthful o' grub. There's plenty o' water, Dick; but what's water 'cept there's somethin' to wash down? If we stick to the spring we can't live on water. If we leave the spring to hunt grub we'll soon be short of water. It's as tight a scrape as I ever see'd."

"We've got something else besides our clothes," answered Dick confidently.

"What's that, then?"

"We've got our clothes and our wits. I calkalate our wits count fur somethin'."

The old tar shook his head doubtfully. He saw no shadow of hope.

"If I was on the ocean now. Or you in the streets of a city. But to be set adrift in the heart of a desert, where we're as innercent as two babies."

The despondence of the old man did not communicate itself to his companion.

"See here," said Dick, holding up his hand triumphantly.

The barrel of a pistol glimmered in the light of the moon.

"Hillo! Where did you git that?"

"Must ha' dropped it from my belt when we was up here afore. I noticed that the Arab only got one pistol from me; so I've kept an eye open for t'other. And I jist see'd it here, shinin' like a star in the moonlight."

"That's a bit o' luck, anyhow," cried the old man shaking off his despondency as he sprung to his feet. "Maybe it's a happy omen. See here, Dick, there's only one thing fur it. We must strike out fur them there hills to the south. If there's water and grub anywhere it's in the hill country. And moonlight's the time for travelin' in this scorchin' country."

"What's the programme, then?" asked Dick.

"Let's veer down to the spring, git a solid drink, lay down on the sand and snatch an hour's sleep, and then strike out fur luck."

"It's neck or nothin'," answered the reckless boy. "Told you we had our wits as well as our duds. Now for a drink and a snooze."

A half-hour afterward they were asleep on the desert sands, as soundly as if they had been on their beds at home, with no dark specter of starvation staring them in the face.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEA OF SAND.

WHEN the two deserted travelers woke from their desert sleep, the moon, which they had last seen on the horizon, stood in the mid-skies, gleaming with a luster that is only to be seen in the moonlight of the desert.

Near them the silvery spring gurgled and glittered in the soft light. The midnight air was cool and refreshing. A soft south wind came over the heated sands.

Old Bob half lifted himself and gazed with a sour frown at the sparkling water.

"Mighty pretty you are," he growled. "If a feller could only git meat and drink out of a cup o' water, we mought camp here. But we's got to set sail, Dick, and take our chances."

"I've got two things in my brain-pan, as I wants to live fur," said Dick. "One of 'em's to find my daddy."

"And what's t'other?"

"To come across that there Hassan. I'm a goin' fur that chap like a mad bull fur a red handkercher."

"Hearty fur you, my prime youngster. He's got the weather-gage on us now. Mebbe our turn mought come. But 'tween you an' me, Dick, I'm afeared we're on a lee shore. Them white-livered hounds knowed what they was about."

"Never say die," answered the bold-hearted boy. "Let's streak out and dig on while we kin move a peg."

He bathed his face in the cool flowing stream, and took a long drink of the pure liquid. Old Bob did the same. He then took off his coat, extracted a needle and thread from somewhere about his clothes, and began to carefully sew up the sleeves. Dick sat looking at him in astonishment. What was the old coon up to now? Bob sewed gravely on, without offering any explanation. Finally, after he had made a very tight seam, he replaced the needle and thread, and rose to his feet.

"What's all that fur?" asked Dick, who could no longer repress his curiosity.

"Only makin' a brace o' water-bottles," answered the old man. "The Arabs make 'em out o' skins, but I guess this greasy old corduroy oughter hold water 'bout as well as goat-hide."

"Mighty good!" cried Dick, with enthusiasm. "I was braggin' 'bout my wit, but I guess it's you that's got it all. Anyhow I've got pluck, and that's as good as brains sometimes."

Paying no attention to the boy, old Bob proceeded to fill his impromptu water-bottles from the spring. Then, with Dick's help, he buttoned the coat around his neck, leaving the puffed-out sleeves hanging down, like two fat sausages.

"If the old corduroy don't leak, we've got a week's water," he declared. "Let's streak out, Dick. Every minute tells now. Can't afford to waste an inch of this moonlight."

"That's jest my notion," answered the boy, cheerily.

In a minute more they had left their harbor of refuge, and struck out into the bleak desert, in which, for all they knew, the nearest spring might be fifty miles, or fifty leagues away.

Rounding the rocky bill, they struck southward across the sands. The moon was now too high to be a guide, and the range of hills which they sought was not visible from the desert level, yet the old sailor laid his course as directly south as though he had been marching by compass. He had not sailed the seas for half a lifetime for nothing.

On they trudged, the hale old man and the alert youth, side by side, over the firm sands of the desert, with the broad full moon lighting their way, and the soft south wind inviting them on.

It was a strange situation; not unpleasant in itself, but decidedly unpleasant in its possibilities. For well they knew that death stared them in the face, and that they were abandoned on the sea of sand, on which no living thing could long exist.

"That hound of a Hassan knowed what he was about," growled the old man. "He mought jist as well have left us trussed up in the cave."

"Dunno 'bout that," answered Dick, cheerily.

"We's got our legs, our pluck and our wits."

"I'd sooner have a camel's back and a rasher o' bacon nor 'em all," grumbled the old tar, sourly, as he crunched the sands beneath his long stride.

The night passed on hour by hour. The moon crossed the horizon and glided down the western sky. Mile after mile was left behind them. They had one thing in their favor—the toughened sinews of the old sailor were good for many a league, while Dick's rough life had made him proof against fatigue.

Hours passed away in this long tramp. The moon neared the horizon. In the east a faint gleam of light betokened the coming day. The hills to which their course was directed had long been visible before them, yet seemed many leagues away in the dim light.

The light in the east broadened and deepened. A rosy flush came upon the sky. The floating shreds of clouds each took on a crimson hue. And now the sun's rim broke into view, sending long, level rays across the yellow sands. The blinding luster of the new day replaced the clear, soft light of the moon.

Old Bob stopped and took a long and careful observation of the surroundings. Far behind them lay the hill which they had left, sinking in

the distant north. In front lay the hills they sought, yet distant.

"There's a good ten miles afore us, and mebbe more," said the old man. "Shall we keep on, Dick? Or do ye feel like restin' yer young bones?"

"Nary rest," answered Dick. "All our hope is in them hills. We've got to touch them afore we draw foot. It's you as ought to feel tired, with them water-bags."

"I'm a tough old knot, my lad. Somehow they feel lighter 'stead o' heavier."

"Don't wonder!" cried Dick, with a yell of alarm. "Dang my buttons if they ain't leakin'!"

"They're fat as ever."

"That's 'cause the stuff is stiff. But the water ain't there."

With an echo to Dick's alarm the old man hastily unbuttoned the coat and lifted it from his shoulders. He cast a sharp glance into the distended sleeves, while a look of blank dismay crossed his expressive features.

"Shoot me fur a land-lubber if ye ain't right! They're as empty as a miser's pantry. Hang the greasy old corduroy, ther' ain't a square drink apiece left!"

"You've been feedin' the desert," answered Dick. "See; it's drippin' now. Before an hour's daylight there won't be a blessed drop left."

"So much the wuss fur our chances," sighed the old man. "Come, lad, we'll have to take our last drink."

"And trust to the hills fur the next."

"That's a weak hope. Hassan wouldn't let us off if them hills had water."

"Dang his ugly picter!" cried Dick between his teeth. "Hope we'll fling off this scrape, if it's only to git our innings on that grinnin' varmint."

"Here is your sleeve," sighed the old man. "Empty it if it bu'sts you. What you don't drink the sand will swaller."

There was little left for the sand when Dick had finished his draught, though he felt swollen out like a water-bag himself.

Old Bob emptied the other sleeve, taking several long, deep draughts of the cool water.

"Guess my skin 'll hold it," he remarked. "We oughter be good for a clean two days now. Let's trot on, boy."

Flinging the empty water-bag over his shoulders he led on at a long, loping pace, that carried him rapidly over the sands. Dick followed with a boy's light, quick step.

As they proceeded, the hills before them rose more and more from the desert, and seemed to stretch a long distance southward. They looked dry and arid in the rays of the sun, and the old tar shook his head doubtfully as his experienced eyes took in the prospect.

"I've seen the like o' them afore," he remarked. "There's many sich in the desert; all rocks and sand, and without a drop of water to bless theirselves with. I'm 'feard we're on a dry trail."

The sun was well up in the sky when they at length reached the base of the hills. They rose sheer from the sand to an elevation of about two hundred feet, and with a barren aspect that dashed the hopes of the travelers. The flank of the hills presented strangely-outlined forms,

looking like ruined castles, long porticoes, or the remains of ancient palaces, to which the bright rays of the sun lent a peculiar charm. The scene might have passed for one of those of the Arabian Nights, as if some malevolent *genii* had destroyed a great city of the past, and left these fantastic ruins to attest their vengeance.

The travelers looked at the strange scene with hopeless curiosity.

"It's mighty queer, and mighty dry. We must dig on, Dick. There's no use climbin' them hills fur water."

"There's a high one further south," rejoined Dick. "Mought make a good lookout. Let's streak on."

An hour's walk along the flank of the hills brought them to the one of which Dick had spoken. It towered far above all the other summits, though but about four hundred feet in height. Ascent proved somewhat difficult. Here was an abrupt wall of rock, over which they had trouble to climb. There was a deposit of soft sand, into which they sunk to their waists.

The summit was soon reached, however. It afforded a long look over the desert, though not a very encouraging one. Right and left, north and south, spread the dreary sea of sand, now level as a floor, now rolling like the waves of a yellow sea, which had become frozen when at their height.

The range of hills on which they stood sunk gradually toward the desert level to the south. But beyond them other hills rose, seemingly as arid and barren.

"That hound of a Hassan knowed what was afore us," grumbled the old man.

"Never say die, that's my motto," answered the boy, cheerily. "Let's git into some of these hollows, and take a rest and a snooze. It's git-tin' too hot to tramp."

It was the middle of the afternoon when they again rose, refreshed by their sleep. A dreary prospect opened before them, but their only hope lay in continued progress.

On and on, all the afternoon, and until midnight, they pushed forward. Another range of hill country had been gained. But there was no sign of water or food, and their hearts sunk within them. Flinging themselves desperately on the sands, they soon fell into slumber, from which they did not awake until near the hour of morning.

They were now in a long, narrow valley between two ranges of hills. It was covered with sand, pebbles and boulders, and presented the appearance of the bed of an ancient river, though now utterly destitute of moisture.

Wearily onward they wandered, almost without hope. Hunger and thirst were growing upon them, and it seemed as if they were indeed destined to perish in the desert, and to leave their bleaching bones on the sands, as predicted by Hassan.

Suddenly the boy laid a hand eagerly on the arm of his companion.

"Stop!" he whispered. "I saw something moving behind that rock. Let me crawl up. It may be some animal."

"Cautious, lad," warned the old sailor, as he crouched upon the sand.

Clutching the pistol, which he had so luckily

saved, Dick crept stealthily on toward the rock in question. It was a huge boulder, which almost filled up the valley. He had nearly reached it when, to his utter surprise, a light, graceful form shot over his head in a long spring, and darted swiftly down the valley. It was a gazelle, the swift-footed antelope of the desert.

The boy turned to fire at the flying animal, but he was checked by a loud, fierce roar, and at the same instant the lithe form of a panther appeared on the rock, his spotted body outlined against the sky, his fierce eyes following the flying gazelle.

Ere the beast could spring in pursuit of its prey the reckless boy had raised his pistol, and sent a bullet into its yellow hide. With a roar of pain and rage the wounded animal turned its attention to this unlooked-for assailant. A quick spring from the rock, and its spotted body hurtled through the air. Only a dart forward saved the boy from its rending claws.

Ere the panther could recover from its spring Dick had turned and sent another bullet crashing into its body. The wild creature rolled over and over, tearing the sands, and uttering howls of pain and fury.

"Back, you risky young rogue!" yelled old Bob, as the boy moved closer to the animal. "Back! And don't waste any more bullets on him. We haven't any to spare, and the critter's got his death-hurt."

At this rebuke Dick sprung back behind the rock. The wounded animal tossed wildly for a few minutes, and then stretched its tawny limbs with a moan of agony.

The old sailor, who had stealthily crept up, now drew a knife quickly across its throat, severing a main artery. The blood spurted freely forth.

Gluing his lips to the wound he took a long draught of the warm blood.

"Quick, Dick," he cried, "afore the critter gits cold. We must drink blood if we can't git water!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MAGIC OF THE DESERT.

A DAY and night have passed since the date of our last chapter, and still the two deserted travelers roam hopelessly southward through the desert. Since the moment in which they quenched their thirst in the blood of the dying panther not a drop of moisture has passed their lips, and the agony and horror of thirst is fully upon them. They are not without food, such as it is. Long strips of panther flesh, dried in the hot sun of the desert during their toilsome journey, hang from their shoulders. But of water there seems no hope.

The country through which they wander is still far from level. At some points it is perfectly flat, and covered thickly with small stones, which render walking very difficult. Elsewhere it breaks into ridges, like the sloping billows of a frozen sea. Again low hills arise, barren elevations of sand and granite such as those they have already vainly examined.

Onward they drag, with weary steps and hopeless despondency in their faces. It is near noon of the third day, and the glaring sun pours its hot beams from a cloudless sky.

"I'm afeard it's all up with us, lad," said the old sailor, in despondent accents. "Sand, sand forever. It's like floating in a salt ocean, and dying of thirst."

Dick could hardly answer. His tongue was parched, his skin dry, his eyes bloodshot. Yet the brave lad held sturdily on. He pointed southward.

"What is that?" he asked. "Is there not something moving?"

Old Bob's eyes, used to make out a sail while leagues away, looked in the direction indicated.

"It is a brace of ostriches," he announced. "They've got their long necks in the air, and are off like clippers fur the hills there to the west. Them critters knows where water's to be found, my boy."

"How fur away's them hills?" asked Dick.

"Mebbe ten mile, mebbe twenty. It takes an Arab's eyes to make out distances 'cross the sands."

"Anyhow, it's our last hope. Let's toddle on. Every step counts now."

The swift-flying ostriches, the race-horses of the desert, vanished in the distance, still heading toward the hills.

For a half-hour more the weary travelers struggled in the same direction, over the sand billows. Then they fell exhausted and enervated by the scorching midday beams. Luckily here they found a shady shelter, under cover of a rock that pierced the sands. Protected from the direct heat of the sun they lay here for several hours, suffering still from thirst, yet gradually regaining strength.

It was the middle of the afternoon when they again dragged themselves to their feet, and recommenced their hopeless journey. Before them lay a long slope in the rolling surface of the desert. A few minutes brought them to the summit of this. Dick was slightly in advance. As his eyes fell upon the plain beyond a sharp exclamation broke from his lips, full of surprise, admiration and delight.

"Hurry up here!" he exclaimed. "If this ain't hunky then I don't know beans. You never see'd the like in all your born days."

Old Bob hurried forward at this glad cry, and in a moment stood beside his companion. His eyes took in the scene with equal surprise and delight.

For before them, seemingly about a mile distant, appeared the limpid waters of a broad lake, glittering and rippling under the ardent sun. And on the further border of these magic waters arose green groves and the white walls and citadels of what seemed an extensive city.

It was a prospect to make the hearts of the well leap with joy. But to those half-dead wayfarers it was a vision of Paradise. They hugged each other, and yelled in delight. The gleaming waters seemed to roll and break almost at their feet. With loud cries of joy they rushed forward, forgetting all weariness and pain, and eager only to fling themselves into the waves of this magical lake of the desert.

The mile which had seemed to separate them from its edge was soon passed; yet, to their surprise, the lake seemed as far away as ever. Old Bob scratched his head in wonder.

"I'll guv in," he declared, "as I can't make

nothin' of distances in the sand. If it was in the ocean now, I could tell ye the distance of a sail to a hair's-breadth."

"Anyhow it's there," said Dick. "We'll fetch it if we keep on steppin' out."

"That's so. But do ye notice t'other side the water. Don't look so much like a city as it did. It's more like sand-hills than houses now."

"Sure enough," answered Dick. "Guess we had the sun in our eyes."

But there was no mistake about the water. They trudged bravely and happily on, almost forgetting the agony of thirst in the hope soon to wet their lips in the sparkling water.

Another mile passed—two miles—yet the strange lake was as far away as at first. And other transformations had taken place. The water had lost half its width. The groves beyond it had vanished. The city had disappeared. A range of hills had taken its place.

The travelers looked at each other in growing dismay.

"I've read of sich things in the Arabian Nights," remarked Dick. "It's the genii of the desert playin' with us."

"It may be the Old Nick if it will," yelled Bob, "but that's water, and I'm goin' fur it."

He rushed madly forward, followed by Dick. For a mile this mad race continued. It ended by their falling on the sand in utter exhaustion. They lay breathing heavily from their exertions for some minutes. At length they crept to their knees, and looked with unbroken eagerness forward.

A cry of horror broke from the lips of the old sailor. The water had utterly disappeared. Only the shining sands remained.

"Has the lake been swallowed up by the desert?" he hoarsely whispered.

He was interrupted by a strange cry from Dick, who was looking back over the route they had traversed, and eagerly pointing.

"There it is!" he shouted. "Yonder! yonder! The blessed water!"

It was true. There gleamed the alluring waters of the lake behind them, as if they had passed through it in their journey.

The boy sprung wildly to his feet, and was about to dart forward in this new direction, when he was checked by the heavy hand of the old man on his shoulder.

"Hold there, lad!" he exclaimed in a tone hoarse with disappointment and despair. "You couldn't be expected to know better. But I've jist been a blind old idiot."

"What do you mean?" cried Dick.

"We've been chasin' the magic lake of the desert, as has drawn many a man to his death. It's the mirage, my boy. Some folks says its enchantment; and some says it's only the sun-glare on the sands. It's my notion it's magic water."

"The genii of the desert," remarked the boy. "Drawin' us on to our destruction."

"I'm afeard they've done the'r work, Dick," sighed the old man. "We've sailed our last voyage."

Dick made no answer. The vanishing of their warm hope was bitter to swallow. It seemed indeed as if some enchanter of the desert had raised the alluring mirage to tempt them on-

ward to death by false hopes. The false vision had flown, and only despair remained.

Yet Dick was not one to easily give up. He observed keenly the features of the landscape.

"The waters have gone," he said, "but the hills as we tuk for a city, is there yit. Is they some trick too?"

"No," answered the old man, "they are real hills."

"And it was to them that the ostriches was headin'. There's our last hope. If we kin hold out an hour more."

Old Bobshook his head doubtfully.

"I'm afeard it ain't in the wood," he answered. "Let's peg out, anyhow, while we've got a sinew to hold. We mought squeeze some juice out of this dried meat."

They moved slowly onward toward the hills, which now rose seemingly not far in advance. The mirage still showed its false waters behind them, but they were no longer to be lured by that phantom. With parched lips and tongue they painfully sought to masticate the dried meat, hoping to gain some alleviation from the devouring thirst.

The loose, shifting sands make walking still more difficult. Every breath of air carried the finer particles before it in an impalpable, blinding cloud. Wearily, with dragging footsteps, they proceeded. An hour passed and they had not gone more than a mile. The wind of the desert grew hotter, though the sun was not far above the western horizon.

The hills they sought now rose close before them. They seemed of a calcareous stone, which shone white in the evening rays. It was a double range of low hills, with no sign of vegetation, save some coarse grasses at their borders. Between lay a narrow valley, closed at its entrance by a transverse ridge.

Less than a quarter of a mile separated them from this valley, their last hope upon earth, yet it seemed as if they would never reach it. Each step was made with pain and difficulty. The last agonies of thirst were upon them. Their skin was dry as parched leather. A thick, yellow scum, like melted wax, covered their tongues. A knot in the throat hindered breathing. A deadly languor oppressed their limbs. A hundred yards more, and the old man's strength gave out. He fell prostrate to the earth.

Dick dragged still onward up the long slope. He was near the summit of the dividing wall between the desert and the valley. Ten steps more would give him a view of what lay beyond. But those ten steps it seemed impossible to take. He fell to the ground.

For a moment he lay there, in utter exhaustion, and then wearily dragged himself forward on hands and knees. Two minutes more and he had gained the summit. The valley lay outspread before his eyes.

He could go no further. He sunk prostrate on the rocky ridge. But a faint cry from his lips reached the ears of his companion behind, who could not tell whether its tones were those of hope or despair.

And the descending sun shone mercilessly on the two wanderers, perishing in the desert.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK STRIKES A BONANZA.

THERE is an old saying that "it is always the darkest the hour before day." All looked dark indeed for the two travelers, dying of thirst in the merciless desert, with the hot sands beneath them, and the descending sun beaming in mockery from the western sky.

Yet hope lay before them, and Dick's faint cry had been one of triumph. For his last despairing glance over the ridge had revealed to his eyes the green flag of the desert, the palm-tree's noble crown of leaves. He knew well what that meant. The palm only grows where water springs. Doubtless a fresh fountain lay at the foot of that noble tree.

Filled with new life at the sight, the boy, too weak to stand, crept onward. Soon his eyes caught the level of the valley, and followed the trunk of the graceful palm to the ground, where a broad circle of green verdure outspread. And in its midst lay a limpid light, the gleam of the diamond of the desert, the gushing spring.

Down the opposite slope the boy rolled rather than crawled. The fear lay upon his mind that this also was some magic vision, and would vanish as he approached. But no—the cool green blades of grass swept his parched face. The sparkling pool gleamed before him, out gushing from under the edge of the rock. His stretched hands touched the cold surface of the water.

In a moment more his lips were glued to the life-giving liquid. But he could not drink. His parched lips, swollen tongue, and choked throat refused their duty. It seemed as if he would perish with life within his grasp.

He dashed the cold water over him. He filled his mouth with water, and lay on his back, letting it slowly gurgle down his throat. Gradually the tense muscles relaxed. New life seemed to dart through his veins. Strength returned to his limbs.

Once more he plunged his head into the cooling spring, and filled his mouth with its grateful gift. Then he rose to his feet and staggered up the ridge, feeling that it was not safe to drink more at present.

In a few minutes he reached his companion, who lay like a dead man on the sands, with glaring eyes and open mouth. His breath seemed to have stopped, and his heart to have ceased to beat. Yet his body was still warm.

Snatching the jacket, with its sewed sleeves, Dick hurried back to the spring. The water he had swallowed seemed to have penetrated to every fiber of his body, and his lost strength was rapidly returning. Filling the sleeves with water he hastened back to his perishing friend. He poured a few drops into his open mouth, and dashed the remainder over his parched frame, wetting him to the skin.

"I've heered as it ain't safe to give 'em much at first," he muttered. "And they say as how a man kin drink through his skin as well as through his mouth."

For a few moments it seemed as though no effect would be produced. Then a convulsive shudder ran through the limbs of the prostrate

man, and a choking cough as the water penetrated his throat.

Dick rolled him over on the sand, and chafed his hands and face.

"Water! water!" came in faint accents from the old man's lips.

"All right, old boss. Hold yer mouth and I'll squeeze ye out a drop more. Ain't goin' to guv ye too much, you bet."

He let the water fall drop by drop into the open lips, that eagerly received it. The color came back to the old man's face. His set eyes moved. After a few minutes he lifted himself to a sitting posture on the sands.

"Never say die!" cried Dick in joy. "Fetched you that time, old boy, and we're good fur another tramp. But I thought you'd kicked the bucket for sure."

"Water! Give me water!" cried the old man hoarsely.

"Ain't goin' to let ye make a hog of yer-self," answered Dick positively. "Ther mought be a thimbl'ful more here, and that's 'nough fur the first innings. Ye kin swaller a hogs-head arter a while."

In a few minutes more the old sailor rose to his feet. The water which had been poured over him had penetrated his skin at every pore, almost as freely as dry sand drinks up liquid.

"Jolly boy, Dick," he cried, as he looked eagerly around. "Guess old Bob's scound meat ag'in. But where did ye git it? I don't see no signs."

"Come this way."

The old man yet staggered with weakness, but he followed Dick over the ridge, to where the palm waved in green glory above the sparkling spring.

"Tain't no mirage this time," exclaimed the boy, with a shout of triumph. "That's the solid stuff; and I bet high we git even with Hassan yet. I move we stick to this spring till we're strong as young bosses ag'in."

"But what'll we do for meat? Ain't got much of the panther grub left; and it ain't fust class provender either."

"Never mind that. I've got an idear," answered Dick.

Another deep draught from the liquid spring, a spare meal from the dry, coarse, ~~meat~~ flesh of the panther, and they stretched themselves to sleep by the grassy border of the rock fountain.

It was a long, refreshing slumber. The sun was up and peering over the eastern hills when they awoke. They rose and looked curiously around them. They found themselves in a deep narrow valley, between a double range of granite hills which became lower to the south until they sunk to the valley level. No other trace of water could be seen. They had apparently struck the only spring of that region of the desert.

A morning draught and a spare meal off the few remnants of meat which remained, and they were ready for the new day.

"We've got water, but what's to be done fur grub?" asked old Bob. "I dunno as we're much better off nor we was at t'other spring."

"We're nearer the edge of the desert any-

how," answered Dick. "And what's more I've got an idear. Come up here."

He led the way up the adjoining hill to a small hollow in the rock, that concealed the spring from view. Bob silently followed him.

"What's your idear?" he asked, as Dick motioned him to crouch into this sheltering cavity.

"It's jist this," answered the shrewd boy. "There's other livin' critters on the desert besides us, and I reckon they've got to have the'r mornin' drink. We saw the ostriches comin' this way. If we keep mum we mought git a shot at somethin' bigger nor a hummin'-bird."

"Bless yer sharp brain!" cried the old sailor, seizing and pressing Dick's hand. "That's an idear that's wuth a gold mine jist now. Somethin' 'll be sure to come, if we keep quiet."

An hour passed. At the end of that time the keen-eyed old sailor, who was looking up the valley, caught sight of some moving objects at its upper end.

"Hist, Dick!" he whispered. "Git yer pisti. ready. Somethin's comin'."

There were still four loaded chambers in the revolver. Dick lay so that he could see the spring through a crevice in the rock. Swiftly down the valley came the objects which the old tar had sighted.

"They're gazelles," he whispered. "It looks like murder to shoot the innercent little critters; but we've got to live."

There is nothing in nature more graceful than the gazelle, with its slender limbs, its delicate, creamy skin, and its small head, with great, liquid eyes. There were a half-dozen in this herd. They came on with long, springing bounds, heading straight for the spring. There was nothing to indicate danger, and in a minute more they were eagerly lapping the water, pressin' upon one another in their anxiety to drink.

"Now, Dick," whispered the old man, "take that fat fellow to the left. Don't miss, on your life!"

The animals were grouped into a straggling mass. Dick took a long, careful aim through the crevice, his heart beating sharply with dread of failure. At length he pulled the trigger, firing more at the group than at any single animal.

A loud, sharp report rung through the valley. The struggling animals sprung outward in startled terror, and stood an instant with extended necks and alert heads. A second report rung out, and with one movement the lithic creatures darted swiftly up the valley.

All but one. One lay bleeding beside the spring. It struggled to its feet, and sought to fly, as old Bob ran hastily down the hill. But it had got its death-burt. In a minute he caught up with the staggering animal, and drew his knife across its throat.

"Thank the stars we ain't got to drink blood this time," he exclaimed, as he lifted the light creature in one hand.

"Back to cover!" cried Dick, sharply. "There's somethin' else movin' up the valley. Maybe we kin git another shot."

"Two shots for one panther, and two for one gazelle. Let's see if the next two kin fetch one ostrich."

"Is it an ostrich?" asked Dick in eager hope.

"Can't you see 'em now, with the'r long legs and necks? There's a brace of the critters, and they're comin' down like a fore-an'-after before the wind. Keep cool, Dick, and take 'em in the brain-pan while they're drinkin'. Jist go fur one. You won't have no chance to git the pair."

The awkward looking creatures came down the valley with long strides, their small wings stretched as if to catch the wind. Soon they were close to the spring. This was very different game from the gazelles, and Dick could not help a trembling eagerness that ran through his limbs. He strove to regain his nerves as he looked upon the great, swift, feathered creatures, now so close below them.

Something seemed to disturb the wary birds. They halted, snuffed the air, and came up with dragging steps, bending their long necks till their heads almost swept the ground.

"They smell the blood of the gazelle," whispered the old sailor. "Keep cool. They won't leave without drinking."

He was right. They approached the spring with great caution, halting frequently and gazing around. There was a quick spring back when they saw the actual blood on the sand. But no sound came from the ambush, and there was no disquieting thing visible.

Again they approached, and one stretched out its long neck to the spring, while the other stood erect like a sentinel. Old Bob laid his hand warningly on Dick's arm.

"Wait," he whispered.

Now the second bent its head to the water, as if the pressure of thirst was stronger upon them than the instinct of danger.

"Now," whispered the old man.

The heads of the two birds were close together in the water. Dick took quick aim through the crevice which had served him for a lookout, and pulled the trigger.

Instantly the two wary creatures drew hastily back, as if neither had been touched. Dick lifted his pistol again. The momentary nervousness which had possessed him was gone. His hand was now as firm as iron, his eye as true as steel. Aiming beneath the lifted wing of the nearest bird, he again pulled the trigger.

As the report broke loud upon the desert air the bird staggered and fell, while its companion sprung alertly away. Dick broke from his cover and rushed down the hill.

"Hold!" screamed the old man. "They are dangerous in their death-agony. Don't go near the critter, you risky young rascal. It won't run ag'in. It's got its settler."

The excited boy halted at this warning. The bird beat the sands with its head and feet. It strove to rise, but fell heavily back. After a minute more it stretched out its limbs stiffly, and lay prostrate.

"It's a goner," cried the old tar in triumph. "Good fur you, boy. If we ain't got no more bullets, we've got meat fur a week and water for a month. Davy Jones won't snatch us this voyage, my lad."

He hurried down to where Dick stood proudly over his feathered game, that now lay dead upon the grass of the desert oasis.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEATH WIND OF THE DESERT.

SEVERAL days passed after the finding of the spring, yet the two friends lingered beside it. They were so exhausted by their previous journey that they determined not to proceed until thoroughly recovered. With plenty to eat and drink, there was no reason for haste, and the desert in advance looked as drear, arid and uninviting as that which they had already traversed.

"Guess we mought streak out this mornin', Dick," said the old sailor. "We oughter be good fur another two days' tramp. And that time, I calkerlate, 'll fotch us through the sands."

"We can't travel in this heat," answered the boy. "Why, it's growin' as hot as a fiery furnace. That wind's jist scorchin'."

He was right. The air had suddenly grown oppressive, the wind hot and parching. Their lungs became choked, their skin dry as if in the breath of a furnace. The wind was full of particles of fine sand, flying before it like the ocean foam before a hurricane.

"It's the simoon!" cried Bob, in alarm. "It's the deadly wind of the desert! Fling yerself on the sand, Dick. Wrap yer coat over your face. It's death to breathe the poison wind."

Dick hastily obeyed. The wind grew stronger and hotter as it blew over their prostrate forms. It was almost impossible to breathe, and every breath seemed like a draught of liquid fire. Then, from the clouds that had rapidly gathered, came lurid flashes of lightning and crashing peals of thunder. It seemed almost as if the end of the world had come, and this was the devouring breath and the terrible trumpet blast, of the destroying angel.

For ten minutes, which seemed an hour, the fiery blast swept that lonely valley. Then its fury diminished, the air grew less scorching, the cloud of flying sand grew thinner, the lightnings played in the far distance.

A minute or two more, and Bob removed the smothering cloak from his face, and looked about him.

"Up, my lad!" he cried. "We've weathered the simoon. Lucky we had the hills on our weather-beam. If we'd been out on the open sands ther wouldn't been no salvation."

Dick rose to his feet, with bloodshot eyes and gasping breath.

"That's yer simoon, is it?" he grumbled. "A feller mought as well hold his face over a pot o' melted iron. I feel jist like a mummy. Guess we best take a dip in the spring."

The water even of the desert fountain was lowered, drank up by the hot, dry wind. After an ablution in its crystal coolness, and a long, refreshing draught, they felt fully recovered, and ready for any new adventures.

"I'm goin' to climb our lookout hill yonder," declared Dick. "There mought be some other strays abroad."

"Not much chance, I reckon."

"Dunno," answered the boy. "I heered some queer noises in the wind."

He hastened to climb the hill in question, the highest of those near them. It was steep, and the shifting sand that covered it made ascent

difficult, but the active boy rapidly made his way upward, and in a short time had gained the peaky summit of the hill.

He was not there a minute ere Bob saw him waving his hat in the air, while a cry of triumph came down to his ears.

"Come up herol!" shouted the boy, as he flung his hat into the air, and then took off his coat and waved it like a banner in the wind. "Come up! I've struck ile, you bet!"

At this summons Bob hastened to climb the steep hill.

"What is it?" he asked Dick, as he neared the summit. "Any sail in the offing?"

"Jist you go high on that. It's a reg'lar caravan. Camels, and hosses, and men. Struck ile, I tell you."

The next minute Bob gained the summit, and looked out over the scene that had so excited his young companion.

Before them, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the flat plain of the desert, with its surface of sand and pebbles, gleaming like a yellow sea in the rays of the sun.

Nothing was visible afar on the broad surface; but just below, at no great distance from the foot of the hill, appeared the source of Dick's enthusiasm. For there was visible a group of men with the brown skins and the gay head-dress of the Arabs, while near them were more than a hundred laden camels.

But something seemed wrong with them. Many of the camels were prostrate on the sands. Most of the men also lay at full length, and those afoot seemed to wander with staggering steps. They had seen Dick's signal, yet appeared too weak to respond to it.

"What ails 'em?" asked the boy.

"Struck by the simoon!" exclaimed the old sailor. "Struck hard. They've got the full breath on it, Dick, while we only got the leavings."

Without further words he rushed down the hillside toward the stranded caravan, followed by the active youth. A very few minutes brought them to the foot of the hill, and a short run over the sands gained them the caravan.

A glance revealed that a great disaster had happened. A number of the prostrate men and camels appeared to be dead, while the survivors staggered with weakness. The reis, or conductor of the caravan, advanced to meet them with trembling steps and parched face. Both hope and wonder shone in his bloodshot eyes. To see two Europeans in the heart of the desert was fair cause for surprise.

"What is the matter?" asked Bob, in the language of the Arabs. "Hit by the simoon, hey?"

"Yes," answered the reis. "It was terrible. Half the caravan has perished. But what's worse it has dried out our water bottles. The hot wind drank the water like a thirsty lion. We are ten leagues from the wells, and not a soul of us will live to reach them."

"Do you know no springs nearer?" asked Bob.

"No. This is a new route to me. All that knew it in the caravan have perished by the breath of the simoon. There is death before us."

But what brings two white men alone in the desert?"

"Deserted by our false guide," answered the old tar indignantly. "If we find you water will you promise to take us safely through the desert, and put us on the track of the false hound?"

"Yes, and help you to revenge," answered the reis. "Life for life, is the Arab's motto."

"Ye're a boss!" exclaimed Dick. "Ye're jist what I call a hunky old boss."

The Arab looked at the enthusiastic boy in surprise. He could only guess his meaning by his gestures.

"Lend me a camel and some water-skins, and two or three of yer strongest men," continued the sailor. "The rest o' ye best keep still. Ye're not in trav'ling shape."

The reis hastened to obey. A camel well loaded with water-skins and bottles was led to the hills by two of the Arabs, preceded by Bob and the boy. For the information of the reader we may say that the water-bottle of the Arabs is made of a single goatskin, hooked to the pommel of the saddle, so that it can be unhooked and drank from while at full speed. But the *ghirle*, or large water-skin, is made of the entire hide of the young camel, capable of holding from fifty to sixty gallons of water. Each camel carries two of these.

Within a half hour the messengers returned, with an abundant supply of water. The thirsty Arabs gathered eagerly around, but Bob checked their haste.

"Hold yer level, hosses," he cried. "You kin wait. These poor hounds that's pegged out want the fust dose. Some on 'em's kicked the bucket; but we mought fetch others on 'em around."

Unhooking the water-bottles, he and Dick, with their attendant Arabs, emptied them over the fallen men. They filled them again and again from the tanks, until all the prostrate Arabs werethoroughly drenched.

This treatment soon had its effect. Several of the fallen men showed signs of life. A few drops of water were now poured into their mouths. The reis had been in situations like this before, and knew just how to act. Soon most of the members of the caravan, and the greater part of the camels, were on their feet. But ten men and double that number of camels lay dead on the sands. The simoon had not passed without its victims.

The survivors gathered around the savers with cries of gratitude. They were too ardent indeed in their manifestations for Dick's fancy, who drew himself grumblingly from the embrace of a fat camel-driver.

"There's a little bit too much taffy 'bout that," cried the impatient boy. "Wouldn't trust you copper-colored hounds. Ye'll be cutting our throats next. Ye're a crew of treacherous hounds right through."

"Hold yer tongue, Dick," exclaimed Bob. "Some on 'em mought understand you. The head chap looks like true grit."

He turned and conversed for a few minutes with the reis, after which the caravan was set in motion. Passing up to the upper end of the chain of hills, they entered the valley over the

ridge at its entrance. A loud cry of joy broke from the Arabs as they saw the waving palm tree, the flag of the oasis. Forward they hastened, men and camels pellmell, to the spring, some throwing themselves at full length into the stream that flowed from it, others burying their heads in the water, some kissing the ground in delight. With loud cries the camels rushed forward, crowding and biting in their eagerness to drink.

It was an exciting and animated scene. The two discoverers of the spring looked on with great interest. They had never seen such a spectacle before.

Ere long men and camels alike, their thirst satisfied, stretched themselves to rest on the floor of the valley. Bob and Dick were drawn aside by the reis, who eagerly asked them their adventures. He was much excited by the story of their perils and lucky escape.

"And your false guide escaped over the desert with a party of robber Bedouins. They have reached Mareb before now. But who is this Hassan?" asked the reis, with eager excitement in his tones.

"Hassan el Ramed, a native of Doan."

A look of bitter hate and fury marked the expressive features of the old Arab. His lips twitched, his hands were clinched in anger.

"I know him!" he cried between his clinched teeth. "I will help you to your revenge. Do you see this?"

He held out his right hand, on whose back was a deep round scar.

"What does it mean?" asked Bob.

"That man and I are sworn enemies," answered the reis. "Do you know how the Arabs swear vengeance? We sat on each side of a blazing fire; we laid in the flames two coins until they became red hot; then Hassan placed his coin on the back of my hand, and I placed mine on his. There they lay, scorching their way into the living flesh, until they grew cold. That is the Arab's oath. While that scar remains on my hand I am Hassan's sworn foe. I have sought him since, but in vain. He fears and avoids me."

"He has been in Egypt, engaged in the war," remarked Bob.

"He is the man!" cried Dick eagerly. "I saw just such a scar on his right hand."

"Then, by Allah, he is my mortal foe! He it was that killed my wife in cold blood, and on whom I have sworn to be revenged!" cried the Arab in fierce hope. "I will aid you in your search. If he escapes you he shall not escape me."

He drew his dagger and plunged it into the sands with bitter energy, as if the heart of his foe lay beneath his hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

VIPERS AND TIGERS.

ONWARD through the desert moved the caravan. Thoroughly refreshed at the rock-side spring, the Arabs were as cheerful as if they had never known thirst, and pushed on with the assurance of reaching an inhabited country within two days.

At the head of the caravan marched a donkey, the guide of the camels, who followed him in

long lines, tied together with palm-leaf ropes. These animals were heavily laden with packs of valuable goods fastened firmly on the saddles. They bore the products of Europe, which were being taken for sale into Arabia.

Other camels carried water-skins, and others again packs of provisions. These consisted of flour, dried dates, rice, coffee, etc., which were tightly packed in great wallets of camel's hair, to protect them from the ants, with which all Arabia is infested. The Arabs make their journey on dromedaries, which compare with the ordinary camel as a thoroughbred with a draught-horse. These animals are smaller and better formed than the common camel, with slender frame and slight legs. Some of them are very swift, and have immense powers of endurance. They have been known to make forty or fifty leagues in a day's march. If we add to this that they can travel three days without food, and eight or nine without water, it will be evident that the dromedary is indeed what the Arabs call it, the ship of the desert.

In advance of the caravan march the *chouafs*, or scouts. These are members of a warlike tribe of Arabs, who hire themselves out as caravan guards. They travel a mile or two in advance, in groups of two or three, in different directions. When the caravan halts, the scouts encamp on the neighboring hills as sentinels. In addition to them there is another body of police, whose duty it is to guard the caravan from more immediate dangers.

These precautions are not unnecessary. Every caravan is exposed to numerous perils. They are frequently assailed by the wild Bedouins of the desert, and even by settled tribes of herdsmen, while there are robbers everywhere who seek any opportunity to steal in upon the caravan. The utmost vigilance is necessary for protection.

The wild beasts of the desert are also sources of danger, the panther, hyena and jackal, while there is a small, but very fierce species of tiger, that adds much to the danger of desert travel.

The Arabs train young panthers to attack these tigers, as we train hounds for hunting. The hunter will carry a couple of trained panthers on the shoulders of his dromedary, with their eyes bandaged. When a tiger is perceived the panthers are uncoupled, and the bandage removed from their eyes. Instantly they spring to the ground and attack the tiger, one facing it, the other turning its flank. A fearful combat ensues. The roars of the three animals, their tremendous bounds, the clouds of dust through which their tawny bodies break, make a terrible scene. The panther which faces the tiger seldom escapes with its life. But the other springs upon the back of the fierce creature, closes its sharp teeth through the spinal column of the neck, and brings the desert king to the earth.

If, however, the mate of the tiger takes part in the fight both hunters and the panthers have work enough before them. With lances and guns the Arabs boldly attack the fierce beasts. The roars of the tigers, the screams of the panthers, the whistling of bullets, the yells of the hunters, the wild turmoil of the fight, make up a spectacle that must be seen to be appreciated.

It generally ends in the death of the tigers, and frequently of the panthers, though the hunters do not always escape.

The reader will forgive this digression from our story, to give a few hints of the perils of desert life. There are other perils of equal danger. The desert is infested by scorpions and tarantulas, whose bite is very venomous; and there are several species of poisonous serpents, comprising the adder, the viper, the asp, and one or two other kinds.

It may be seen, then, that desert travel is surrounded by many dangers. Heedless of all this, however, the caravan pushed on, traveling mostly by night and resting by day. At the end of the second night new ranges of hills were observed, of different aspect from the barren sand-hills just passed.

They were clothed sparsely with green, the shimmer of flowing streams could be seen, the white fleece of flocks of sheep was visible in the pastures, the forms of the herdsmen appeared perched upon lookout rocks. Cries of joy arose throughout the caravan. Loud cries came from the camels, as they pushed on with redoubled speed. Strange feelings filled the minds of the two Americans as they found themselves at length in the heart of Arabia. They had left the desert behind them, but no one could tell what perils lay in advance.

"We've got to hold our level now, my lad," said the shrewd old tar. 'Tain't trouble with the desert robbers, or with want o' water now. Ther's quicksands afore us, and we've got to steer mighty keen, for some of these town Arabs is wuss nor the Bedouins the'rselves."

"I ain't no fool, anyhow," answered Dick, confidently. "And I'm goin' fur my daddy if I go through fire and water. Guess I l'arnt a thing or two in Egypt."

"It was a different kind of thing from what's afore us now," and old Bob shook his head. "I've been here afore, and know a thing or two. Jist you foller my lead, and I calkerlate we'll pull through."

"If my daddy's anywhere he's somewhere 'mong the towns," averred Dick. "Wonder if the reis'd know anything 'bout him."

"It's wuth axin', anyhow."

The conductor of the caravan was interrogated about the whereabouts of the shipwrecked sailor, but he could give no information, except that he had heard a vague report that a European was held as a slave in some of the southern governments.

"Then that's where I'm bound," declared Dick. "I'm bound to find him if I have to travel every foot of the country."

The caravan soon reached the hills. And now a very different country was entered. They had gained the mountain border of Central Arabia. There were still many desert regions before them, but there was also much inhabited country, where rich crops were raised, and well-populated towns were to be found. Their approach to this region was celebrated by a quick change of diet. Some sheep were purchased from the herdsmen, and a plentiful feast of mutton was spread before the travelers, who were tired enough of their sparse desert fare.

"That's what I call bunkum," cried Dick, over his platter of boiled mutton. "Don't talk 'bout yer dried gazelle or ostrich-meat, or that panther grub that was tougher than dried sole-leather. I believe, if they don't stop me, I'll eat a whole sheep afore I'm done."

"And I won't stop short of the hind-quarter of a cow," declared Bob. "Ain't had a square meal all together since we left the ships."

Their feast, however, was brought to a sudden termination. They had halted beside a narrow stream, in a small grove, where the thick grass furnished an abundant meal to the hungry camels. But a wild and fierce uproar aroused our two friends from their meal. The Arabs were running hastily in all directions, as if utterly overcome with terror. The camels, bellowing with fear, were rushing away, heedless of the calls of their drivers. A sudden and utter panic had come upon the caravan.

Bob and Dick rose to their feet and looked around in surprise.

"What is it?" cried the former. "An attack of Bedouins?"

"Worse than that," answered the Arab addressed. "It is an attack of serpents. Look at the ground at your feet. We have encamped in the Resort of the Vipers."

It was true. The reptiles could now be seen writhing over the sands beneath the grass, or interlaced among the branches of the trees. A number of the camels and several Arabs had been bitten, and "save who can" was the general feeling, as they fled madly in every direction.

"Run, my jolly youngster!" cried old Bob. "But don't lose yer head, like these here wild fools. Be keerful how you put yer feet down, and look out sharp fur the reptiles."

"Nary run," answered Dick; as he cautiously picked his way from the grove. "When ther's snakes around a chap ought to look afore he leaps."

Once escaped from the dangerous spot, the Arabs recovered their heads, and set themselves to gather the frightened camels. But it took much time and trouble to collect the scattered animals.

It was found that three of the camels, which had been bitten in the lips while cropping the grass, were dead. Several others were poisoned, but these were saved by cauterizing their wounds with red-hot irons. The same treatment was applied to the men who had been struck. Also the poison was sucked from the wounds of some of them by their friends. Yet, in spite of all efforts, they suffered intense pain, and became deadly sick. They vomited freely, and in several cases violent convulsions attacked them. It was necessary to remain encamped for several days to give the patients a chance to recover, and in spite of every effort two of the unfortunate camel-drivers died.

The caravan at length resumed its journey, the reis greatly depressed at what seemed to him a bad omen for the rest of the trip. The region through which they now passed was very different from that of their former travel. Mountains of considerable size arose in all directions, with fertile valleys between, traversed by running streams. Here many crops were raised.

and villages of some size appeared. But there were also barren regions, where the caravan wound around the flanks of arid mountains.

And now at intervals unknown strangers would suddenly appear in the caravan. Asking insinuating questions and picking up such information as they could gather, they would as strangely disappear, particularly if they thought themselves watched.

"They are the *regabs*, the runners of the desert," explained the reis to his two guests. "They glide in and out like snakes, and no one can tell when they come or how they go."

"But what are they after?" asked Bob, curiously.

"They want to find out all about us. They may be the agents of robbers, who design to attack us, or of the rulers of the country, who keep a sharp watch on all travelers passing through it. It is likely your coming is already known far in advance."

"I hope my daddy'll git to hear on it then, and hunt us up," remarked Dick. "I've got 'most enough of this here sandy country."

Two nights after they halted near a large village. The men and women of the village, with the well known hospitality of the Arabs, came out to meet the caravan, bringing presents of milk, bread and salt.

But the intercourse that ensued was suddenly broken by screams of terror, that came from a grove to their left, through which ran a slender stream.

"What's afoot now?" cried Dick. "More snakes?"

"Wuss nor that, maybe," answered Bob, as he followed the Arabs, who were hurrying to the scene of alarm.

As they did so two tigers broke from the grove, running toward the neighboring hills. But a yell of fury and alarm broke from the Arabs as they perceived that one of them bore on its back a slender female form.

It appeared that some of the young girls of the village had been disporting on the banks of the stream, when these animals suddenly sprung among them. One of the girls was seized and flung on the back of a tiger, who made hastily off, followed by his companion, who remained in the rear as if to guard their retreat.

Wild yells rose from the Arabs as they perceived what had occurred. Seizing hastily their weapons, they set out in sharp pursuit, accompanied by the two Americans, who were very ready to see a tiger-hunt.

CHAPTER IX.

BEARDING THE TIGER IN ITS DEN.

A TERRIBLE uproar followed the onslaught of the wild beasts. The screams of the frightened children, the yells of the furious Arabs, the wild cries of the women, the snarling roars of the tigers, the explosion of guns as shot after shot was hastily fired, made up a scene that was at once frightful and exciting.

The animal that carried the stolen child still held on to its prey, retreating slowly and with difficulty. Its companion made several fierce rushes back, scattering the pursuers in dismay. Soon a chance bullet struck the fierce creature in the shoulder, knocking it over. But it was

up again in an instant, mad with rage and pain. A brace of wild bounds, and it was in the midst of its pursuers.

The hunters boldly met it. There is no man can look death in the face more firmly than an Arab, when it is a question of a hand-to-hand fight. With daggers and lances they faced the infuriated beast, and a desperate fight commenced.

Meanwhile a party, Bob and Dick among them, kept up the pursuit of the other tiger. It gained the flank of the hills, and suddenly disappeared in an open crevice, the doorway to some hole or cavern under the rocks.

The pursuers stopped and looked at one another in dismay. Here was an unlooked-for and dangerous termination to the chase. They had been afraid to fire at the animal for fear of injuring the child, and now it seemed safe from their pursuit, for all shrunk from the perilous enterprise of bearding the tiger in its den.

The yells and screams which arose from the scene of the fight behind were now changed to shouts of triumph. The animal had been slain, but not before it had fearfully torn one of the attacking party. The remainder of the Arabs came crowding up, but all shrunk in dismay when they learned that the wild beast had taken to its den.

"Who will attack him?" cried the reis. "I will pay fifty crowns to the man that dares venture."

For a minute there was no answer. The men cast blank looks upon one another. The entrance was so narrow that only one man could go in at a time, and it looked like going to certain death. But suddenly a youthful voice burst out in very imperfect Arabic, thickly sprinkled with English words.

"I'm yer hoss! I ain't going to let that little gal be chewed up alive, nohow. Guv me a light and a knife, and I'll go for the critter."

It was Dick that spoke thus boldly. He came forward with set face and flashing eyes.

"I've got a Yankee's pistol here; what we call a revolver. There's six bullets fur our gentleman. I'm a-goin' fur the little gal."

"Why, you wild young fool!" yelled Bob. "You'll be torn into carpet-rags afore ye know what's about. Let the Arabs try it on, as know somethin' about the ways of the critter."

"They're afeard," answered Dick, disdainfully. "It was a sweet-faced little gal, and she sha'n't be chewed up alive if I kin help it. I'm a-goin' fur that wild animile."

Before Bob could make further objections Dick had seized the dagger and torch, which one of the Arabs held out to him, and in a minute more had plunged boldly into the narrow rock crevice.

Grasping the keen blade between his teeth, he held the smoking, resinous torch in one hand, and the pistol in the other, as he felt his way heedfully onward into the cavern.

A few steps brought him to the end of the narrow passage. It now opened out into a wide, rounded space, which was lit up by the flame of the blazing torch. The scene which met the boy's eyes was enough to make an older heart quake with fear. On the rock floor of the cave crouched the fierce animal, growling with

rage, while its long tail swept in circles to and fro. Its savage eyes were fixed on the daring boy with a gleam that made him shudder. Close beside the animal lay the stolen child, insensible, yet apparently unhurt, except where it had been bitten when first seized.

"In time, anyhow," exclaimed the reckless boy, "but you kin shoot me if ther's any time to waste. That critter's got jump in his eyes."

Raising the pistol, he took a quick aim between the glaring eyes, and pulled the trigger. The sharp report was followed by a terrifying roar, as the wounded animal sprang suddenly forward in a wild leap.

Dick jumped back and fired again at the supple body of the savage beast. Whether hit or not, it did not seem to be much hurt. It was gathering itself for a second bound when the excited youth dashed his pistol in its face, and ran forward, dagger and torch in hand.

The flaming torch, thrust into its open jaws, caused it to draw back with a howl of pain and rage. Dick followed, cutting savagely with the long, keen blade of his dagger. The boy's blood was up, and he was bound to make it a fight to the death.

He had no time to repeat the blow ere the creature was upon him. Down he went before its fierce leap, and in an instant he felt the tiger's claws burying themselves in his side.

It was a perilous moment. The dagger had been knocked from his hand in the fall, and he could only grasp the throat of the savage creature with both hands, and keep off with all his strength the white teeth and red jaws that glared in ravening fury above him.

Weaponless, prostrate, torn already by the claws of the monster, looking into the open throat of the savage brute, life seemed not worth a moment's purchase to the reckless boy. He shut his eyes and breathed a hasty prayer.

The animal lay still for a moment on its helpless prey. It had been badly hurt by Dick's assault. The life-blood was fast flowing from its veins. Yet it had strength enough left to tear its enemy to fragments, and the boy waited silently for the end. He felt no fear. Perhaps he was past fear. He lay with shut eyes, simply waiting for the inevitable end.

Suddenly a terrible crash rung through the cave, attended by a blinding flash of light, as if the lightning and the thunder-peal had broken from its roof. The tiger settled with a heavier weight upon its prey. A convulsive shudder ran through its limbs. Dick yet held, with a last desperate effort, the ravening jaws from his face.

He was greeted with a loud, familiar voice, as the weight was suddenly removed from his limbs.

"Wake up, shipmate! Stir yer stumps, my hearty! The critter's gone under, and ye're good as a dozen dead men yit."

It was the voice of Bob Backstay. Dick opened his eyes. The tiger lay dead beside him. The grizzled old tar stood over him, with a smoking matchlock in his hand. It was like a coming from death to life.

"Ye're true gnt, Dick, but ye'd gone to Davy Jones if I hadn't stepped up jist in time. I fol-lered ye, boy, and put a bullet in the critter's

head fist as it was goin' to rip ye to pieces. Are ye bad hurt? Git up and let's see if ye kin stand."

Dick did so, but he was weak from loss of blood, which was flowing freely from the deep rents made by the tiger's claws.

"The gal," he asked, in a faint tone. "Is she safe?"

"Sound and prime, lad. Ye're a boss, Dick. 'Tain't every coon as is ready to face a mad tiger. But ye're bleedin' like a stuck pig. Let me git you out. That blood's got to be stopped."

Several of the Arabs had now entered the cave. Dick, too weak to walk with ease, was carried out, and his gaping wounds were soon bound up by a skillful Arab leech.

Meanwhile the slain animal and the child were carried forth. The latter was hurt, but had received no serious wounds.

We must run hastily over the events of the few succeeding days, the gratitude of the villagers, the grateful tears of the mother over the rescuer of her daughter, the rapid healing of Dick's wounds, which fortunately were but flesh hurts. The caravan halted for several days, until he should be in condition to go on with it.

It was a bright October day when they again mounted their camels, Dick first bidding a warm good-by to the people of the village, and to the child whom he had saved, and who clung to him with grateful kisses, as if she could not bear to see him go.

Over the saddle of his dromedary was spread the tawny, striped skin of the slain animal, prepared and presented to him by the villagers.

"I'll freeze on to it, and take it back to Amerikay, you bet," he positively declared.

October in that tropical region was a very different season from what it is in our frozen north. The sun beamed yet too warmly for travel at midday. Yet the autumn was shown in the ripe fruits which bordered their path, the purple clusters of the grape, the golden balls of the orange-groves, the yellow bunches of the banana, the waving arches of the date trees, with their clusters of ripe fruit.

Two or three days of travel through this region, in which fertile patches were broken by level stretches of sand and gravel, or rolling ridges of sand in which the camels sunk to their knees, brought them to the verge of a larger oasis. It seemed a thickly-populated region. Evidences of pasturage and of cultivation of the soil appeared on all sides, while they passed many villages, the scenes of active industry.

They finally approached a large town, the capital of the district. It was surrounded by a wall, as are all the principal towns of Arabia. But it was in a ruinous condition and only fit to keep out the wild tribes of the desert. Only the tops of the houses could be seen above the wall, except one large central building, which rose like a tower in the heart of the city.

"That is the citadel of the *Nagib*, the ruler of *Jebel Shomer*, as this country is called," explained the reis. "He is a peculiar man, of uncertain temper, and you will have to act with shrewdness and wisdom when he sends for you, as he will be sure to do."

"S'pose we don't choose to go?" remarked Dick, half angrily.

"That will only make things worse. You are in his power, and will have to submit to any ordeal which he may inflict. He has the fashion of trying the courage of all strangers that come to his court, and he has little pity on those that display cowardice."

"Dick here isn't much of a coward, anyhow," said Bob. "I won't say fur myself."

"I don't fear for either of you," answered the reis. "But it was necessary to put you on your guard."

The people of the caravan were rapidly preparing for a considerable halt while this conversation went on. They were unloading and tethering the camels, pitching their tents, and making other necessary changes. Already many of the people of the city had flocked out, and showed a disposition to traffic with the caravan.

While the two Americans looked on with interest at this scene, they were approached by the reis.

"The *Nagib* has heard of your arrival, and has sent for you," he remarked. "Remember my warning."

"We won't forget," answered Dick.

Two officers of the ruler, attired much more richly than any Arabs they had before seen, were waiting for them, and led them into the town through its open gates.

The strangers looked curiously around them, as they traversed the narrow streets. The houses were low, and were built mostly of stone, though some were frail, wooden edifices. The place seemed thronged with people, actively engaged in various avocations, yet all ceasing their labors to gaze with curiosity upon the white faces and peculiar dresses of the strangers. Very few Europeans had ever penetrated to that region of Arabia.

They soon reached the dwelling of the *Nagib*, a tall, square, stone edifice, with court yard and wall that seemed intended to stand a siege.

CHAPTER X.

THE ORDEAL OF THE ARAB.

THE palace of the *Nagib* of the city of *Hayel*, the capital of *Shomer*, was a square stone building of five stories in height, with vaulted chambers underground, in which were dungeons and dens for wild beasts.

A group of fierce-looking soldiers occupied the lower floor, while arms of every kind covered the walls. The two Americans were led to one of the upper floors, where the *Nagib* awaited them, surrounded by the principal men of his kingdom. He was a tall, handsome man, dressed in rich silk robes. At his side hung a cimeter, with a hilt of gold; and he rested upon a gun whose stock was richly inlaid with precious stones. The nobles surrounding him were also all richly armed.

This Arabian ruler met his guests with a frowning countenance.

"Do you not know," he harshly asked, "that no Europeans are permitted to enter our kingdom?"

"That mought be so," answered Bob boldly.

"But we happen to be Americans, so that don't count."

"Americans? What are they?"

"We come from a great country beyond the seas," explained Bob. "The land of brave men. The finest country the sun ever shone on."

"Except Arabia," answered the Nagib, proudly. "You cannot deceive me. There is not a step you have taken in this country that I do not know. I have my scouts everywhere. You came from the English army. What brings you here?"

"We are in search of this boy's father, who is held prisoner somewhere in Arabia."

The Nagib turned, and looked with interest in Dick's intelligent face.

"You have lost your father?" he asked.

"He was wrecked," explained Dick. "He is a prisoner somewhere among the Arabs. I'm arter him if I have to go through the whole country. I kin be killed maybe, but I can't be turned back."

The Nagib smiled at Dick's broken Arabic. He turned and made a sign to some of those surrounding. Instantly the two daring strangers were seized by the hands of powerful negro slaves.

"I will try your boasted courage," said the Nagib sternly. "You are bold men to venture into my kingdom. If you are not brave men you will not get out of it easily. Are you ready to venture into the dens of wild beasts, and there prove your courage?"

Bob looked at Dick questioningly.

"We're in fur it," said the bold boy. "He'll chop our heads off if we show the white feather. Let's dig in."

The old sailor turned, and signified his assent to the ordeal. At a sign from the Nagib the slaves conducted the prisoners to the basement of the tower. Here they were each given a sword and a lamp.

"Walk straight forward," said the Nagib. "The doors will open of themselves before you. See that your lamps go not low, and be careful to look not behind you. If you are brave men you will see the light of day again. If not, take now your last look at the sunlight."

Pushed forward by the slaves through an open door, they heard it close with a sharp clang behind them. They were in a region of utter darkness, except where the lights of the lamps threw a feeble glow. Before them was a flight of stone steps, covered with a damp mold. Down these they proceeded into the subterranean vaults beneath the tower.

At the foot of the stairs a long, gloomy passage spread before them, like a tunnel in the living rock. It seemed to be closed at its extremity, but as they approached it a door flew open before them. They had no sooner passed through than the door closed again with a resounding roar.

They looked around them with a feeling of awe. They stood in a domed cavern, with snow-white stalactites depending like icicles from its roof. The floor was covered here and there with stagnant pools, while vipers and other poisonous reptiles crawled and squirmed over its rocky surface.

No trace of a door could be seen. Even that

by which they had entered was invisible. The prisoners looked at each other with dilated eyes.

"We're in fur it now, in good airnest," said the old sailor. "Keep a stiff upper lip, my boy, fur ther ain't no fun ahead."

"Wonder if he's goin' to leave us to be chawed up alive by snakes?" queried Dick. "I'd guv my hat if we was back on the desert."

"We was to push straight on, and never look behind," suggested Bob.

"Dig's the word then, snakes or no snakes," returned the bold boy. "Let's peg out."

Across the cavern they went, carefully avoiding the venomous serpents. But the opposite side seemed only solid rock, and they were debating what was next to be done, when suddenly an immense slab of stone sunk silently before them, revealing a yawning opening in the cavern wall. They quickly stepped through, when the stone rose again behind them, closing all retreat.

They were now in a passage formed of stone walls. As they went on, here and there an iron door appeared in the solid masonry, as if the entrance to some deep dungeon. The distance through this dismal vault seemed interminable. It appeared to wind and curve. Finally it opened out into a larger hall.

The faint light of the lamps cast a feeble luster through this subterranean apartment, revealing a spectacle that made them shudder; for the floor of the dismal hall was covered with the bones and skeletons of human beings, some of them ground to dust, as if the place had been used for centuries as a charnel-house. The smell of a sepulcher pervaded the hall; a wind, coming from some unseen cavity, moaned through it. The prisoners shuddered as they looked around them. Had the Nagib sent them here to die of starvation, as hundreds seemed to have died before them?

"I've got enough of this!" cried Dick hastily. "Let's git out of it."

But it wasn't so easy. No trace of a door was to be seen. They tried the walls with their sword-hilts, but only a dead, solid sound returned. A sense of horror filled their souls. It seemed, indeed, as if the faithless monarch had sent them here to perish.

They were on the point of despair when suddenly they perceived a low, narrow door open before them, where just before had appeared only solid masonry.

"The old chap is true grit arter all," exclaimed Dick, joyfully rushing forward; "but I've had enough of that there hole for my born days."

"And here too," cried Bob, hastily following him.

They now entered new passages in which, as before, appeared iron doors of dungeons. Hastening rapidly onward a stairway opened before them, leading upward by wooden steps rotten with dampness. It led to another stone avenue above.

"This is all mighty funny," declared Dick, "but I'd like to see them wild beasts he talked about. I'd sooner be chawed up by a rhinoceros at one't than buried alive 'mong dead men's bones."

He was answered by a growl so deep and

fierce that he sprung back in alarm. The old sailor raised his sword, and stood on guard.

The growl was repeated more fiercely than before, and was answered by a chorus of frightful roars, as if from a dozen savage beasts. Cautiously proceeding toward these sounds, they suddenly found themselves in an open space, where the lamp-light revealed a group of iron barred cages, filled with savage animals. Here was the spotted leopard, here the maned lion, here the striped tiger and tawny panther. All were wildly springing from side to side of their cages, and roaring fiercely, as with hope of possible victims.

"It's a reg'lar fust-class menagerie," exclaimed Dick. "Anyhow we know what's afore us now."

"I'd sooner face a mad elephant than be locked in them rooms we've jist come through," declared Bob. "Wonder if our road to daylight leads through one of them cages."

As he spoke the door of the central cage, before which they stood, suddenly opened. It was tenanted by a huge panther. The fierce animal drew sullenly back into the depths of its den before the two armed men, growling terribly, glaring at them with flaming eyes, and crouching as if for a spring.

"That's our way, Dick," cried Bob. "At the critter afore it can jump."

They rushed forward, brandishing their swords. The animal crouched still lower, and then, with a fierce roar, sprung toward its foes.

It seemed the moment of a terrible conflict, in which one or all of the combatants must perish.

But at the instant of the spring a grating sound was heard, and an iron door descended from above with a ringing clang. The leaping beast struck with a hollow thud against this firm shield, that separated the combatants. Dick had struck a fierce blow at the leaping brute. His sword blade rung on the solid iron.

"Ye're mighty keeful of yer old critters," cried the boy, whose blood was fully up. "Guess ye don't want yer panthers carved."

A loud laugh followed. A bright flash of light shot through the room. The Nagib and his suite were revealed to the astonished prisoners.

"You have borne the ordeal bravely," cried the ruler. "Come. It is written that you are not to die by the claws of the beasts."

"I hope there ain't no more of this sort of provender laid out," said Dick to his fellow captive. "I don't 'preciate them sort o' jokes."

They followed the Arabs up a flight of stairs which ascended at the extremity of the apartment. In a few minutes they were in the fresh air and the sunlight again, glad to escape from the gloomy vaults.

"You are not to die by the beasts, but you are by the bullet," continued the treacherous Arab. "I will not have my country invaded by English spies. You shall meet the fate that you have dared."

At a signal the two prisoners were again seized, and held by firm hands. The Nagib clapped his hands, and a man came from an adjoining room at whose appearance they both started in astonishment and indignation.

It was Hassan, their treacherous guide. He held a pistol in his hand, while his face was full of triumphant malignity.

"Do you see now how I know your errand?" asked the Nagib, with a dark frown. "This man was your companion from the English camp. He knows you for spies. I have chosen him for your executioner."

"He is a lying bound!" cried the old sailor in a rage. "He is a treacherous dog, that robbed us and deserted us in the desert."

"Your words are in vain," answered the Nagib. "I trust an Arab rather than an Englishman."

"Nary Englishman. We're true-blue Americans," cried Dick. "Yankees right through."

Unheeding these interruptions the treacherous guide advanced to the old sailor.

"I intended you should die in the desert," he said in a low tone. "You somehow escaped. You shall not escape me now."

The old man shut his eyes, as the pistol was held so as almost to touch his breast.

"Fire!" he cried. "An old sailor is always ready for the end of his life's cruise."

Then came a loud report, a sharp flash, a twinge of pain in the victim's breast.

But to the old tar's surprise he was still alive, and unhurt. He opened his eyes and looked at the villain, who was falling back with a look of baffled hate.

"You have deceived me. The bullet was drawn," he fiercely cried to the Nagib.

"Release the prisoners," commanded the latter, with a wave of his hand. "As for you, Hassan el Ramed, this old man's story is true. You basely deserted him and his companion in the desert, after taking their money as guide. These are brave men. They saved the lives of a caravan in the desert. They entered the tiger's den to rescue its living prey. They have gone through the ordeal like brave men. They are free, and your life is in their hands. Command by what death your enemy shall die," he asked the old sailor.

"I wish him no harm," answered old Bob. "There is a man in the caravan whom he has injured more than he has me. Let him be taken as a prisoner and delivered to the reis of the caravan."

"What is the name of the reis?"

"Selim al Nassib."

"No, no!" cried the wretched criminal, his courage suddenly turned to terror. "Kill me yourselves. Do not deliver me into that man's hands to be tortured!"

"You have invited your fate," answered the Nagib, coldly. "You are beyond pity and hope."

At a wave of his hand the wretched prisoner was removed, still begging in terrified tones for mercy.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HORSES OF THE DESERT.

"I CAN tell you where your father may be found," said the Nagib.

He was seated with his two late prisoners in the upper room of the citadel, from which they had a long view over the city and its environs. Coffee and cakes were offered to them by black

slaves, and *narghilehs*, smoking with fragrant tobacco, stood ready for their use.

"That's what I'm arter," cried Dick, joyfully. "Put me on his track, and I won't trouble this here country much longer, you kin bet high on that."

"You have acted bravely," continued the Nagib. "The child you rescued from the panther is a relative of my family. I owe you a reward for your courage."

"Bless you," cried old Bob, with a grin, "we weren't the sort to stand by and let the little critter be chawed up alive by the wild animile. It weren't in Yankee flesh and blood to stand it."

The Nagib sipped his coffee in silence while his guests waited for what might come next.

"The Arabs are brave, and love brave men," rejoined the grave ruler. "I owe you a reward. The father of this boy is in the great kingdom of Nedjid, which lies south of Shomer. He is a wise man. He has gained a high office under the ruler of that great country. I would send you there with an escort, but unfortunately there is war just now between Shomer and Nedjid."

"Guv us a free foot," cried Dick, joyfully, "and we'll fotch it alone. If my dad's there I'm goin' through, if I have to walk over snakes."

Near one of the gates of the town, which was visible from their lofty station, a disturbance had for some time been in progress. Now a messenger could be seen hurriedly approaching the citadel. The Nagib sipped his coffee gravely, but it was evident, from the quivering of his lips, that he was not quite calm internally.

In a few minutes the messenger made his appearance excitedly in the apartment of the ruler, preceded by one of the dignitaries of the palace.

"Speak," said the Nagib, gravely. "What is your errand?"

"The prisoner, Hassan el Ramed, has escaped," answered the messenger. "He seized the cimeter of one of his guards at the gate, cut him down, and sprung upon one of your excellency's horses which stood saddled there. He is in full flight for the desert. Riders are after him, but none are so well mounted as he."

The Nagib rose so hastily that the cup he held was dashed in fragments to the floor. The veins on his temples knit themselves like knot-cord. His fingers closed around the gilded hilt of his cimeter as if he would cut down the messenger in his rage.

"Go!" he cried, in a voice of thunder. "Let him be pursued to the death! He has stolen one of my horses, of the famous Nedjid breed. I will have the slave's life for it, if I pursue him to the ends of the earth."

The messenger flew, as if glad to escape from the presence of the fuming chief. The latter stamped the floor in his rage.

"Haste to the caravan," he cried to another. "Tell the reis, Selim al Nassib, to come here immediately. I would see him."

This courier, too, hastened off. After a minute more the angry Nagib settled down to his *narghileh*, gravely motioning to his guests to do likewise.

Silence reigned in the apartment. The only evidence of the late fury of the ruler was the

dense cloud of smoke which he drew from the amber stem of the pipe. His rage was evaporating in smoke.

Not a word came from his lips. His guests smoked in the same silence, rather enjoying the new situation of smoking the oriental *narghileh*. In half an hour the messenger returned, bringing with him the reis. The latter seemed greatly excited.

"I have heard that you sent me my mortal foe," he said, after the first words of greeting. "He has escaped. He is mounted on one of your famous steeds, with the feet of the wind and the mane of the storm-cloud. He is pursued, but will not be overtaken."

The Nagib inclined his head in grave assent.

"He must be followed by his foes," continued the reis. "And mounted on horses of equal race and speed."

"That is why I sent for you," remarked the Nagib. "You have sworn to hunt him to the death. There are two here whom he left in the desert to perish of starvation. I have three of the pure blooded horses of Hedjaz in my stables, as swift as those ridden by the Prophet. Will you join in pursuit of the thief?"

"Until death," cried the reis joyfully. "I have sworn it."

"And you?" the Nagib asked his guests.

"Which way has he gone?" queried Dick.

"Toward Nedjid."

"Then we're arter him like cats arter mice. Trot out yer Arab hosses, and put us on the track."

"He deserted us in the desert. He tried to shoot me here," cried Bob. "It is our turn now."

An hour afterward the three pursuers were mounting their steeds in the court-yard of the citadel. The horses brought out for their use were of the noblest breed of the celebrated Arab race. Their tapering heads, flashing eyes, and wide nostrils; their sloping shoulders, deep chests, and clean, sinewy legs; their thin, but muscular bodies, and spirited movement; all betokened them to belong to that royal race which has been sung for centuries by the poets.

They had been already provided with provisions for themselves and their riders, who now mounted them, armed with cimeters, pistols, and the long Arab matchlock. A few words from Selim, the reis, to the officer who was to succeed him in charge of the caravan, some parting advice from the Nagib, and the three men rode from the gate of the citadel, the center of all eyes.

As their noble steeds bore them gracefully through the streets of the city, throngs of the citizens impeded the way, and loud cries of encouragement greeted them. The story of the escape and intended pursuit had spread through the streets, and all the inhabitants seemed gathered in the narrow avenues.

At length the city gate was passed. They rode out on the broad plain beyond. The horses now stepped out with a long, free stride that showed what was in them if pushed to their speed. Through the broad, cultured region, now yellow with the fruits of the harvest, they pushed onward, toward the hilly region that rose to the south.

"This is what I call life," cried Dick joyfully.

"Lucky we got the hang of riding these Arab hosses in Egypt."

"I'm glad to git away from that town, anyhow," replied Bob. "Tain't none too healthy."

Selim remained silent, his lips clinched, his eyes burning, his face working with suppressed emotion. Evidently the task before them was to him a very different matter than to his two light-hearted associates.

They had ridden about a mile from the city when they met some horsemen returning from the chase of the escaped robber.

A hasty conference took place between them and Selim. They pointed southward to a break in the distant chain of hills.

"He is making for that pass through the mountains," exclaimed Selim, to his associates. "A dozen of the Nagib's troopers are still in pursuit. But they ride in vain. He can laugh at them with the steed he bestrides."

"And what is your plan?" asked Bob. "Is he making for the desert?"

"Yes. He has friends there among the Bedouins. He will join some robber troop. We must seek to run him down first."

Onward they rode with the same long, clean stride. Night was approaching when they reached the range of hills to which their course was directed. The narrow notch through these hills which they had seen from afar now opened into a broad, winding pass, almost level with the plain. They rode briskly through it, the granite slopes rising abruptly on either side. In a few moments they had passed the range, and entered the country beyond.

It presented a remarkable change. The green, fertile land they had lately left was replaced by a long, sandy level, broken here and there by rocks, and sand ridges, but with no signs of life except a thin, straggling grass. They were once more on the desert.

Selim here checked his steed, and took a long and careful observation of the country before them. There was not a point in the horizon that escaped his watchful eyes, and when he again gave his steed the rein he had the whole country like a map in his mind.

The Arabs accustomed to the desert have wonderful powers of sight and hearing, in which respect they are the equal of the American Indians. The least mark has a meaning for them, and they can tell the members of different tribes by their footprints in the sand.

"There are two Bedouins approaching, mounted on dromedaries," he announced. "We may learn something from them of the chase."

His companions saw the forms to which he pointed, like misty, shapeless figures on the desert. Old Bob shook his head doubtfully.

"There's not many kin beat me in making out a sail on the horizon," he said. "But I ain't got eyes fur your sand snipe."

The horses were pushed rapidly forward. They seemed to take with pleasure to the desert. They neighed and curveted gladly, and broke into a long, loping stride that carried them rapidly forward. Soon the approaching Arabs were plainly visible.

"They are Bedouins," announced Selim. "They ride dromedaries of the Soudan, the best in Arabia. But the animals have been driven hard, and show signs of distress."

"How can you tell that?" asked Dick, curiously. "Why, they ain't within half a mile on us yet."

Selim laughed disdainfully.

"No two breeds of dromedaries are alike," he said. "Look at the clean-cut limbs, the small size, and the whitish color of those animals. The Soudan dromedary is like a horse in speed, but these creatures are dragging wearily onward."

In a few minutes more they were close at hand.

"It is as I thought," said Selim. "Those are men of Nedjid."

Dick raised his head at this information. The name of Nedjid, the country in which he hoped to find his father, had become of interest to him.

"Whither go you?" asked Selim, after the usual desert greetings had been passed.

"To the Nagib of Shomer, with dispatches from Nedjid."

"Have you met any strangers on the desert?"

"Yes. Troops of Shomer. In pursuit of a flying thief. They are behind the hill that rises there to the right."

"Good," exclaimed Selim. "Night is approaching. We must push on."

"You are from Nedjid," cried Dick. "Can you tell me if there is a white man there? Whether a prisoner, a slave, or an officer of the monarch?"

"Yes," answered the Arab. "There is a white man in the court of the ruler. I can tell you nothing more. We are free men of the desert, and know nothing about courts and monarchs."

The impatient horses took the rein and sprung briskly onward, while the camel-riders pushed toward the distant city. In a half-hour the hill was reached to which they had been directed by the Bedouin. Turning its flank they came suddenly upon the troop of pursuers. They were on their return, baffled and disappointed.

"He was too well mounted for our heavy horses," they explained to Selim. "The rogue played with us. He is off yonder to the south. Night is on us, and pursuit is useless."

"Not for me," cried Selim. "We are special messengers of the Nagib, and charged to follow the villain to the death. We are as well mounted as he."

"Fortune attend you. But you cannot follow him through the night."

"Hatred sharpens the eyes," answered Selim. "He is my mortal foe."

The three pursuers rode on the southward.

Night fell upon the desert, but Selim led on with grim determination. The noble horses, although they had already come miles from the city, strode forward with redoubled speed, as free and light of step as if but just leaving the stable.

CHAPTER XII.

STRIKING THE TRAIL

THE gloom of night lay on the far-reaching sands. The sky was partly clouded, but to the south a group of stars displayed their silvery radiance. With his eyes fixed upon these, with set lips and frowning brow, Selim pushed for-

ward, as grim and silent as a fate. His companions followed in equal silence.

Their noble horses strode onward with the same long, smooth, free, telling pace. They seemed like living machines, which might go on forever with that swift, firm gait. It was the very poetry of movement.

Suddenly Selim pulled up his horse to a dead halt. His companions halted, too, in surprise at this movement.

"We stop here," he said briefly.

"You do, hey?" cried Bob. "Why, I thought you were goin' to chase that pirate all night."

Selim pointed to the south.

"The stars are gone," he replied. "We have lost our beacon-light. To go on now would be to wander in circles, and wear out our horses idly. We must rest ourselves and our steeds for to-morrow's work. It is no child's play we have before us."

He had already sprung to the ground, and was relieving his horse of its burden. His companions did the same, satisfied with Selim's reason for the delay. In a half-hour more the necessary preparations for the night were made, and men and horses alike were locked in deep slumbers on the desert sands.

It was near morning when they awoke. Exhausted with the labors of the day, they slept long and soundly, and aroused fresh and vigorous for the new day's labors. Some food and water to the horses, a hasty meal for themselves, and they waited until the reddish flush in the east should grow into the full light of day.

"This region is haunted by bands of Bedouins," explained Selim. "Ugly rogues they are, too, that live mostly by robbery. Many a caravan has been attacked by them, and only whitening bones left on the sands to tell of its fate. Hassan is seeking to join some of them. If he succeeds in finding a troop, he can laugh at our pursuit."

"It's likely the hound knows what he's arter," answered Bob. "If he j'ines the desert thieves we're done fur."

"Ther's none on 'em kin run us down, anyhow," declared Dick. "Don't b'lieve ther ever was three such hosses as them of ourn. If they want a stern chase let 'em dig in."

A sharp exclamation from Selim arrested their attention. He pointed through the gloom which the coming sun was fast dispelling.

"Bedouins," he said, hastening to prepare his horse for the road. "Our speed may be soon tried."

The two Americans looked in the direction indicated, but could make out nothing but some darker, moving shadows.

"Sure?" queried Bob, as he sprung to his horse.

"Yes; fully a dozen of them. Mounted on horses. Haste for your lives!"

This warning was not needed. In a minute more they were all in the saddle and ready for the road.

At the same time the Bedouin troop swooped suddenly out of the darkness, and bore down upon them, with wild yells and brandishing of weapons.

There was not an instant to spare. Giving their horses the rein, off went the noble steeds.

like a flight of arrows, fresh from their night's rest, and ready for a long day's work.

The first wild burst took them beyond gunshot of the Bedouins. A few bullets were sent after the fugitives, but they merely tore up the sands in the rear.

In a few minutes more the light freshened. The first beams of the sun shone in the east, and lit up this wild desert flight and pursuit.

Selim's keen vision had not deceived him. There were about a dozen in the robber band. With yells and imprecations they pushed their horses to full speed, and came thundering on in the wake of the fugitives. But a laugh of disdain came back as the small-limbed, blooded horses of Hedjaz skimmed the sands like swallows, rapidly distancing the heavier horses of the pursuers.

"We can play with them," said Selim, with a grim smile. "These horses are of royal blood. They are descended from the favorite steeds of the Prophet. They have the tread of the gazelle, and the endurance of the dromedary. Let them pursue the wind rather than us."

Bidding his comrades keep on, the bold Arab wheeled his horse and rode straight back toward the pursuers. Dick and Bob looked in surprise at this movement. The Bedouins seemed equally surprised. They checked their speed and keenly watched their coming foe. Arrived within gunshot, Selim made a wide sweep to the left, and rode half around the robber troop. Suddenly he halted so sharply as to throw the horse on his haunches. A sharp report broke on the silence of the desert. One of the Bedouins was seen to waver, and fall headlong from his saddle to the ground.

A volley followed this daring attack, but already Selim was in full flight, swinging his gun in wide circles around his head, while a cry of insulting triumph was borne back to his discomfited foes.

He was now to the left of the robber troop, some of whom kept on his track, while others sought to cut him off from rejoining his friends.

But Bob and Dick took the cue, and directed their course eastward, while the winged steed of Selim darted in disdain around the lumbering horses of his foes. Another yell of disdain came from his lips as he rode onward at a curve, keeping just beyond the reach of bullets, and joined his friends to the south, who had drawn rein to enable him to overtake them.

"They will not follow us much further," he cried, as he came up with an eagle's speed, the noble horse neighing as if in pride at his exploit. "Their sheik lies bleeding on the sands. They must soon see that it is idle to chase the winds."

"Why did you turn back?" asked Bob.

"For a closer look at the troop," answered the Arab with frowning brow. "I fancied that my foe might be with them in disguise. We may push on to the south. Hassan is not there."

"The dirty dog has gone on then," cried Dick. "I'm yer boss to foller him if it takes till Christmas. Let those coons keep it up if they think there's any fun in it."

For ten minutes more a part of the Bedouin troop continued the pursuit. But at the end of

that time they drew up and turned their horses, sending a yell of baffled rage after their hoped-for victims. A cry of disdain was returned. Selim led straight on, heading due south.

"We have thrown those hornets from our path," he said. "We may meet others before the day is over."

"But how do you know that Hassan has steered south?" asked Bob. "He's left no wake in the desert. He mought have gone to the east'ard or the west'ard."

"No," answered Selim, with a confident shake of the head. "I know the ways of the desert as you do of the sea. He has headed for a well that lies here to the southeast. After that is passed we must seek the print of his horses' hoofs."

Ten minutes more of rapid riding and the desert well appeared. It was surrounded by a green border of fresh herbage, quickened to life by the grateful moisture. Soon the travelers sprung from their horses, bathed their sleek heads in the cooling water, and permitted them to drink moderately of the refreshing liquid. They quenched their own thirst also, and gave the animals a half-hour's rest, and a chance to crop the fresh grass that grew rankly by the well side.

"Now," cried Selim, at length. "Saddle and rein. We must to our task again."

They had not ridden a hundred paces from the well before he drew up his horse to a walk, and fixed his eyes with a keen glance on the smooth surface of the desert sands. His comrades had no difficulty to comprehend the cause of this movement. Even to their untrained senses the footprints of a troop of horses were plainly apparent.

Selim followed the tracks for some distance, and at length sprung from his horse to examine them more closely.

"Bedouins," he at length remarked. "A large party. They passed here less than an hour ago. They are on a plundering expedition, and are riding in great haste, like vultures with the prey in sight. Their game is the caravan which is moving now behind that range of low hills to the west."

His two comrades looked at him in open-mouthed astonishment. He seemed to be reading from a written scroll, so confidently did he speak. Yet there was nothing to their eyes but some crescent-shaped scratches on the yielding sand.

"That's all taffy," cried the boy, at length. "Ther' ain't no livin' magician as kin make all that out o' them sand-holes. 'Tain't in the wood."

"Hassan is not with them," continued the Arab, as he remounted. "I have not yet tracked my foe."

"But jist s'pose you open out that log-book," demanded Bob. "How do you see all that in the sands?"

Selim looked at him with a proud smile.

"I have used no magic," he answered. "Any one may see that the party is a large one, and that they ride the unshod horses of the Bedouins. As for the time you may see that these tracks are clean cut. Yet an hour ago there was a fresh wind blowing, which would have quickly filled them with sand. Again, you may

see that not one of them turned aside to the well. That proves great haste. There are no signs of pursuit, so only hope of plunder could have taken Bedouins at such speed past a desert well. For the rest, there is a regular caravan route behind those hills. These thieves have had out their scouts, and have been advised of a caravan small enough to attack in safety, or perhaps idly guarded."

He rode on briskly, following the hoof marks over the desert.

"Why do you take that route?" asked Bob. "Hassan is not there, you say. I calculate we don't want no more Bedouins than we've had to-day a'ready."

"Thieves smell out thieves," answered Selim briefly. "I must see if my foe has joined his kin."

He kept his eyes fixed keenly on the ground beneath. They proceeded thus at a sharp pace for several miles, toward the hills which Selim had pointed out to the westward.

Suddenly a wild cry of triumph broke from the lips of the scout. He turned his horse and rode in a wide circle around a spot in the desert. Then, flinging his matchlock in the air, he caught it as it fell, and twirled it wildly around his head.

"Hassan!" he yelled, "My foe! There are his hoof-tracks! He has joined the Bedouins here. Onward, comrades! Vengeance lies before us!"

"Can you be sure of the footprints of any horse?" asked Bob doubtfully.

"Yes, as sure as of a man's face. It is the Nagib's steed, of Nedjid blood. A gazelle's footprint is not like that of a camel. Onward!"

He gave his steed the rein, and the mettled animal, full of the fire of his rider, sprung onward with a speed it had not yet shown. The other horses followed, with like rapidity.

Ere long they were close upon the range of low hills. The Bedouins' hoof prints headed straight for a pass that cut through them. As the pursuers approached this pass they were greeted by the sounds of a distant battle. The roar of musketry, and the shouts of combatants came to their ears, muffled by distance.

Checking his horse Selim cautiously mounted the incline before them. Reaching its upper level a long view was given over the plain beyond.

There, about, a half-mile away, appeared the expected conflict, a turmoil of moving bodies of men, horses, and camels, and the incessant flashes of musketry and gleam of sword-blades.

"The caravan is bravely defending itself," cried Selim. "Come, comrades! To the rescue! To the rescue!"

Down the hill thundered the swift Arab steeds and their bold riders, seeking the fray.

CHAPTER XIII.

REVENGE AT LAST.

So fiercely were the desert tribes fighting that they failed to perceive the approach of this new party of horsemen. The Bedouins were mounted on horseback, the people of the caravan mostly on camels. The discharge of musketry had ceased, and the combatants were now at close quarters, cutting and slashing viciously

with their curved cimeters, or with the long, two-edged swords which some of them wielded.

A number on both sides were already stretched dead on the sands, and several horses and camels also lay prostrate. Yet it was evident that the bold desert robbers were gradually getting the best of the fight. The others were retreating before them, step by step. The retreat threatened to turn into a despairing flight as they beheld three horsemen dashing across the plain, like reinforcements to their foes.

But suddenly from the matchlocks of these strange horsemen there came a mingled flash and report, and their bullets hurtled into the Bedouin troop. A yell of hope arose from the caravan. They pressed forward again, striking savagely. More than one of their foes went down before that fierce onslaught.

With answering cries Selim and his comrades bore down upon the troop of brigands. A pistol-shot from the Arab laid one of the Bedouins low. Old Bob, as he came up, swung his empty gun like a cudgel around his head. A Bedouin pushed out to meet him, with lance in hand. Before they met, he darted the keen pointed lance with a sure aim. But a quick swerve of his trained steed saved the old sailor from the sharp weapon, which whistled harmlessly past.

Ere the Arab could draw another weapon Bob was upon him. Down came the heavy stock of the musket with a crashing blow on the defenseless head of the Bedouin. Like a weed crushed by a falling oak, he rolled from his horse to the ground.

Dick was little less successful in his onslaught. He encountered a Bedouin armed with a cimeter. The latter gave a shrewd left-handed blow, which would have finished the career of the boy had not his horse sprung sharply aside. Dick returned the blow with the sword which the Nagib had given him. His blow was awkwardly dealt, and struck the horse instead of the man, hamstringing the unlucky animal. Down went horse and man in a heap to the sands.

A shout of triumph rose from the successful combatants, as they turned their horses with a touch of the rein, swerving from the Bedouins, a dozen of whom were now rushing out to meet them. Their shout was echoed from the people of the caravan, who rushed upon their foes, inspired with new courage.

Like clouds before the wind darted away the swift-footed steeds. The pursuing Bedouins were well-mounted, but their horses lumbered after the winged steeds of the Nagib.

Around his pursuers Selim rode, the well-trained horse obeying the touch of his finger, while the shrill Arabian yell burst from his lips as he played with his foes like a swallow with a hawk.

His wild cry was echoed with a sound never before heard on those desert reaches—the loud "Hurrah!" of the English race, as the two Americans followed their skilled leader. Heedfully watching until one of his pursuers became somewhat separated from the others, Selim sharply turned and swooped upon him, cimeter in hand.

Ere the surprised Bedouin could prepare to defend himself, his foe was upon him. A sharp

sweep of the razor-like blade through the air, and the head of the brigand was shorn clean from his shoulders, and fell with a thud to the sands. The headless trunk, spouting blood, fell headlong to the other side.

Dick and Bob, not to be outdone by this feat of their comrade, turned and bore full down upon the pursuing Arabs. A cry of alarm from Selim warned them of the danger they were running; but the American blood was up, and they were not to be checked in their mad career.

Wielding their matchlocks like clubs, they rode side by side upon the foe, filling the air with wild hurrahs.

The Arabs did not wait for them. Disheartened by their losses, and startled by the strange cries and new mode of fighting of these white-faced foes, they turned and fled. At the same moment the assailers of the caravan gave way before the onset of the defenders, and broke and fled in all directions over the desert sands.

A roar of triumph followed. Horses and dromedaries were turned in pursuit. The crack of musketry was resumed, as the pursuers loaded and fired their long-barreled weapons. More than one of the fugitives bit the sands, his career checked by a bullet.

(The Arab matchlock, it may be well to say, is a kind of weapon long behind the age with us. Instead of the modern percussion-cap, it is discharged by a lighted match. This is a cord of slow-burning material, which the Arab carries coiled around his neck, lit at its free end to touch the powder in the pan of his musket-lock. Antiquated as these weapons are, the Arabs are often very expert in their use.)

In the hot chase that followed the blood of the Nagib's horses told. Shooting past the camels, they rode around the flanks of the flying Bedouins, seeking in the separating troop of desert brigands the form of their foe.

A shrill yell from Selim told of his success. With face contorted with rage he pointed to an Arab flying at the head of the fugitives, on a horse seemingly as swift as their own.

"Hassan!" he cried. "My enemy! Keep back. No one must deal with him but me."

Patting his horse's neck, he stooped and seemed to whisper in the ear of the intelligent animal. The horse, which had been darting forward with the long stride of a racer, now broke into a pace, to which his former speed had been as child's play. He seemed to fly rather than to run, as he spurned the smooth, hard sands beneath his rapid hoofs.

The horses of the two Americans, emulous of the speed of their companion, followed with equal swiftness. Dick clutched the mane of the flying steed, clinging to his back with monkey-like closeness. Old Bob rolled like a ship in a gale, and gasped for breath, as he blurted out a string of sailor's oaths.

But it seemed destined to be a long, hard chase. Hassan had evidently recognized his pursuers, and darted forward on his stolen steed with a swiftness equal to their's. At first sight of the pursuit a cry of sneering disdain came from his lips. He evidently thought to distance them with ease. But his look of triumph changed to one of concern as he noted

that they were keeping pace with his utmost speed.

"By Allah!" he muttered through his clinched teeth. "They have been mounted by the Nagib. They are on the winged horses of the Prophet's breed. Heaven help me now from my foes!"

It was an exciting scene that now presented itself on the breast of the desert, beneath the unclouded sunbeams of Arabia. Like beads from a broken string the desert robbers were flying in all directions, hotly pursued by the victorious caravan people, variously mounted on horses and dromedaries. At the point of the late fight many forms of men and animals lay dead or wounded and the ground, while beyond them were grouped the loaded camels of the caravan, guarded by a body of dismounted men.

Straight south rode that portion of the chase in which we are specially interested. Scarce two hundred yards in advance of his furious pursuer, rode Hassan, pushing his mettled steed to its fullest duty. Behind came Selim at equal speed, his teeth clenched, his eyes flashing with the fire of revenge. The two Arabs were thorough horsemen, and rode as if they formed a living part of the animals they bestrode. We cannot say as much for the two Americans, though they were gradually getting a firmer seat in their saddles. For the movement of their horses was as smooth as it was swift, and Dick soon ceased to clutch his horse's mane, and Bob to roll in his saddle like a lugger in a chopping sea.

For several miles the hot chase continued. They were almost alone upon the sands, for the dispersal of the Bedouins was making a rapidly-widening circle. Hassan still held his own. But he had not gained an inch. The horses seemed exactly matched.

"Hold, thief! Hold, robber and murderer!" yelled the furious pursuer. "It is your foe that calls! It is Selim al Nassib, your sworn foe! Hold, coward, for the panther of revenge is on your track!"

Hassan made no answer. He pushed on, glancing anxiously to right and left. He had reason, for the range of low sand-hills of which we have already spoken curved here to the left, and lay directly across his path. There was a change also in the character of the sand. It was growing loose and heavy. His horse was already beginning to labor.

He swerved to the left. But it was too late. Dick had already perceived the trouble ahead, and had turned his horse at an angle to the west, followed closely by his companion. They had the start of the fugitive, and would inevitably cut him off if he sought to take a new course. But he could not keep his present route. The sand grew heavier with every tread, and the lighter horse of his pursuer was already shortening the distance between them. The trapped villain looked anxiously for some avenue of escape.

A yell of triumph came from his pursuer.

"I have you now, Hassan el Ramed," he shouted. "Turn, like a man, and trust to your good blade instead of to your horse's legs. It was to be war to the death between us."

"I cannot fight three to one," retorted the fugitive.

"My companions shall not interfere. It shall be one to one, and till the death, if you dare it."

"So be it then," cried Hassan, turning his horse so sharply that the animal seemed to swing around on a pivot.

The movement was so sudden that it nearly took Selim unawares. With a cimeter in his left, and a short javelin in his right hand, Hassan darted on his foe, the unchecked speed of the two horses bringing them quickly together. Rising in his stirrups he sent the keen javelin like an arrow through the air. The movement was so quick and unexpected that Selim only escaped being struck by the weapon by a quick bend of his body to the right. It came so near as to pierce the folds of his loose robe.

Not behind his foe in alertness he caught the spent weapon ere it could fall to the ground, and sent it hurtling back with deadly aim. They were not ten paces apart. But Hassan saw the peril in time and bent his face to his horse's mane, letting the weapon pass harmlessly over him.

The next instant they were upon each other, cimeter in hand. The sharp, curved blades met with a ringing clash, and they seemed to twist together like flaming serpents. With springing and rearing horses the furious combatants dealt blow after blow. But both were of equal skill with the weapon, and every blow was either parried, or avoided by some movement of the horses trained to swerve at a finger's touch.

Bob and Dick had ridden up, and checked their horses, looking on with deep interest at the desert fight.

"Keep off!" cried Selim. "It is war to the knife. One of us must die. Come, coward, wretch, murderous dog!"

Each of these expletives was accompanied by a shrewd blow, which was deftly parried by his antagonist.

Both of the combatants were bleeding, but no serious hurts had been received. The weapons were wielded with such skill that they served at once as sword and shield. Again and again they struck furiously, but each time blade met blade, and turned aside the blow.

Finally, Selim swerved and rode square against the fore flank of the horse of his foe. His blade came down with such fierce energy that Hassan's cimeter was dashed from his hand. But his own blade broke off short at the hilt, so that they were both disarmed at a single blow.

Nor was this the only result of the stroke. Hassan leaned far over from his saddle to avoid it. At the same instant the two horses plunged heavily together. The overbalanced steed went down before the double force, and man and horse rolled together in the plain.

In an instant the unhorsed combatant was on his feet, dagger in hand, just as his foe sprung from his horse and drew a like weapon.

The combat was resumed—hand to hand, and blade to blade, on foot on the yielding sands.

"Go it, Selim!" yelled Dick, no longer able

to contain himself. "Pile in. Let him have it. Down with the dirty traitor and thief."

No urging was wanted. Breathing heavily from their exertions, the combatants sprung together, cutting viciously with their slender but keen weapons.

Each caught the uplifted arm of the other, and stood with clinched teeth and glaring eyes, gazing furiously in the other's face. They seemed of equal strength. The wrist of each was held as in the jaws of a vise. Neither gave a step before the pressure of his foe. It was a question to which the victory would fall.

But the treacherous sands yielded beneath Hassan's foot, causing him to slightly stumble. In an instant his foe broke, by a quick twist, the hold upon his wrist, and plunged the keen weapon to the hilt in his breast.

Down like a log he went, dead at the blow, while a yell of savage triumph broke from Selim's lips as he waved the bloody dagger in the air.

"At last my murdered wife is revenged!" he cried.

CHAPTER XIV.

PLAYING WITH DEATH.

THE day had passed. Night had long since descended upon the desert. Miles away from the scene of conflict the three companions were stretched upon the sands beside a desert well.

Selim, full of joy at his triumph over his foe, was sleeping as soundly as an infant. Beside him lay Dick, curled up and as sound as a rock, with a boy's heavy slumber. Old Bob's snore showed that he, also, was in the power of the god of sleep.

The night was near its end. Over the plain, unheard by the sleepers, came the faint sound of hoofs on the sand. The tethered horses grew uneasy, and jerked in impatience at the cords that confined them. At length a loud neigh of alarm told of the danger they had scented.

Selim, with an Arab's alertness, sprung up wide awake in an instant. He stood for a moment with his ear bent to the wind, and then sprung hastily for his horse. As he passed, he called loudly to his sleeping companions.

"Up! up! Danger is upon us!"

Like a flash the alert Arab was mounted, while Bob was just rubbing his eyes, and Dick still lay unmoved.

"Up! To your horses!" again yelled the Arab. "The enemy is upon us!"

This last summons aroused his companions, but it was too late. Out from the darkness, like a moving cloud, rushed a body of horsemen, and poured like an avalanche over the region of the late camp. Selim was off into the desert, but his two comrades sprung for their horses in vain. They were surrounded and captured ere they could reach the tethered steeds.

It had all passed so suddenly that Dick was not yet wide awake when he felt his hands drawn sharply behind him, and firmly bound with a cord that seemed to cut into his wrists.

Old Bob was cursing like a hurricane, but he only brought shouts of mocking laughter from the Bedouins, as they tied his hands tightly behind him.

A party of the captors had continued their

course in pursuit of Selim, and the sound of firearms came from the distance. But they might as well have chased the wind, and they soon returned baffled from the pursuit of the flying steed.

"It matters not," said the leader of the troop, with Arab philosophy. "The well has given us more than water to-day. We have two of our enemies in our hands. And we have won those fire-footed horses, each of which is worth a kingdom."

He went up and patted the necks of the noble steeds as tenderly as he might have touched the hand of a royal maiden. The diamonds of Golconda would have been worthless pebbles to the Arab in comparison with those matchless coursers.

"It's jist as I had a notion, Dick," said the old man to his fellow captive. "It's the same party of blackguards as we fought with yesterday morning. I'm despirat afeard we're in trouble, my lad, fur a gen'wine Arab never forgits. Don't you show 'em the white feather, no matter what comes."

"Nary time," answered Dick boldly. "It's all in a lifetime, I s'pose. Anyhow, this is the third time we've been took prisoner, and they say ther's luck in three times."

"I dunno," answered Bob, with a doubtful shake of the head. "They've got mischief in their heads, and I don't see a ghost of a show to git away."

"We've got off twice, and we're bound to git off the third time," persisted Dick. "I won't giv up the ship while I'm whole and sound, you bet."

While this conversation was going on, the Arabs were occupied in watering themselves and their horses, and in partaking of a scanty meal of dried dates.

Yet the prisoners were not left unguarded; and from the scowling looks of the lean-visaged guard, and the nervous twitching of his fingers over his long lance, it was evident that they were in danger.

The sun was well up when they again began to prepare for their journey. The sheik and one of his principal followers mounted the captured horses, turning to their prisoners with a grin of derision.

"The bloody thieves! There go our hosses," growled the old tar. "I calkulate we'll go next."

"Never say die," answered Dick. "We mought ride them hosses yit."

The captives were mounted on two of the sorriest horses in the troop, while a brace of armed and scowling Arabs took stations on each side of them. A word from the leader and the troop was again in motion, scouring over the desert toward the rising sun.

Onward for miles they went, through the fresh morning wind, their wild faces beaming with joy in the free life of the desert.

The Indian in the depths of his native forest, or on the broad prairies of the West, is not more at home, or more glad of his free life, than is the Bedouin of the desert, who loves the sands as the mi-er does his gold.

As they rode on they failed to perceive afar off, on the very verge of the horizon, a solitary

horseman moving onward in their track. It was Selim tracking his foes. The brave Arab had no thought of deserting his unlucky comrades.

Noon was approaching when the troop at length drew rein. They were many miles away from the scene of the capture. The smooth level of the desert had now changed to a series of long undulations, like frozen billows of sand. In the valley between two of the highest of these swells they at length came to a halt.

It was a secure harbor, for they would have been utterly invisible to any one crossing the desert a hundred yards away. But the eyes of the shrewd Selim was upon him, and the desert was to him like an open book to a scholar. Not a movement of the Bedouin troops had escaped his observant eyes.

Binding the feet of their prisoners, so that they could make no effort to escape, the Arabs flung themselves upon the warm sands for their noontide rest. No true Arab travels at noon, under the sweltering rays of the midday sun, but the hotter hours of the day are always taken for repose.

It was mid-afternoon when they became again astir.

"Ther's mischief in the bounds," growled old Bob. "Look how they're eying us."

"Dunno as they could find anybody handsomer to look at," answered Dick. "They're ugly enough thei'selves to turn milk sour."

Their confab was interrupted by the appearance of the sheik, a sour-faced, grizzled old chap, with a long beard, and the eye of a hawk.

"We have decided on your fate," he coldly announced. "We owe to you the loss of a caravan. Some of our friends lie dead on the desert. Killed by your hands. You are strangers and spies in the land of the Arabs. Do you know what all this merits?"

"You've got our horses. Ain't that enough?" asked Dick.

"They may answer for the loss of the caravan. But for our dead comrades you must die," answered the sheik. "Make your last prayers to Allah."

"Mebbe you dunno as I'm a Christian, old graybeard," answered Bob in English. "Catch me prayin' to your heathen gods."

"Looks blue, Dick," he continued. "I'm afeard we're goin' to kick the bucket."

"Never say die," answered Dick. "Won't guv in while I kin wag a finger."

Yet the Arabs seemed in deadly earnest. A pair of stout tent-poles were firmly buried in the sands, and the prisoners bound to them.

Then the Arabs gathered in two lines, while some of the best mounted of them rode off, brandishing their spears.

"Looks as if they was goin' to play with us, like a cat with a mouse," grumbled the old sailor. "Don't you wink, Dick. Let 'em see as ther's brave blood in American veins."

"Nary wink," answered the brave boy. "I'll never go back on the land of the Stars and the Stripes."

Up like an avalanche, came the mounted Arabs, yelling, and swinging the long spears above their heads. On approaching, they aimed dead at the hearts of the captives. But

the latter faced them boldly, without permitting a shadow of fear to show on their set faces.

At the critical moment the sharp spear-points were thrown upward. The Arabs passed like a wind, leaving the captives unharmed at the very instant that death seemed to hover over them.

"The strangers are strong-hearted," said the sheik, with a frowning brow. "We shall see if they are proof against fear."

Again the horsemen rode up, this time bearing short javelins in place of their spears. As they approached, these weapons were hurled, one by one, with vigorous hands.

"Mere boy's play," muttered Bob, as the first javelin passed through his hair, grazing his skull.

The others were thrown so skillfully that the helpless captives were touched at a dozen points by the sharp weapons, yet the skin was scarcely broken.

"Hope ye're enjoyin' it," cried the stout-hearted old tar to the sheik. "It's first-class fun. Jist keep it up, if ye like circus play."

The Arab leader was evidently losing his temper. He ground his teeth in anger, and a deep oath came from his lips. But another party of horsemen had now ridden into the course, armed with the long matchlocks of the Bedouins.

Putting their horses to full speed, they rode furiously up, discharging their weapons as they advanced. The whistling bullets hurtled past the ears of the captives. One came so close to Dick as to cut a strand of the cord that bound him. Yet they still remained unharmed.

A smile of contempt marked the old sailor's face.

"That ain't bad fur Arabs," he said. "But if ye're thinkin' to make two full-blooded Americans squirm with yer boy's play, ye're barkin' up the wrong tree, that's all. Jist let us loose and we'll show you a thing or two."

A look of bitter anger came to the old sheik's face. With a harsh cry of rage he rushed for his captured horse, seizing a spear as he did so. His comrade mounted the other steed of the Nagib, and with frowning faces they rode off to the opening of the course.

"You have laughed your last at the Arabs," cried the sheik. "You shall not find that I mean play."

In fact it could be seen that he was in deadly earnest as the horses were put to their speed. The spears bore with a sure aim at the breasts of the captives. The latter shut their eyes, in momentary dread of the coming death.

Down with furious speed came the mettled horses, the eyes of their riders glittering with deadly purpose, the steel spear-heads gleaming in the sun. It looked as if nothing less than a miracle could now save the unlucky captives.

But at this critical instant crack came a volley of musketry over the ridge of the adjoining sand-hill. Down from their horses went the two riders as if they had been struck by lightning. Onward dashed the riderless steeds past the captives, who opened their eyes with surprise to find that they were still in the land of the living.

And over the hill, with ringing shouts, came a

mingled crew of footmen and horsemen, pouring in fury on the surprised Bedouins.

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

SELIM led the way, on his matchless horse, and in an instant cut the captives loose from their bonds. But he was sharply followed by a well-mounted and well-armed troop, who cut and slashed with deadly intent at the surprised Bedouins. Down went the desert robbers like chaff before the wind. Less than a dozen of them succeeded in mounting their horses and flying from the assault. These fugitives were hotly followed by the mounted part of the troop, while the others ran for their horses, which they had left in the adjoining valley.

At the head of the assailing party rode a tall, thick-set, oldish man, with a stern, deeply-lined face, and features which did not look like those of the Arabs.

He did not join in the pursuit of the fugitives, but sprung from his horse and walked hastily to the liberated captives, his face working with strange emotion.

"Who are you?" he cried in good English. "You are strangers! Those are American faces! Have I not seen that countenance before?"

"Mebbe you have," exclaimed the old sailor, whose face was full of a like feeling. "My name's Bob Backstay, at your sarvice. And if I ain't mistaken, that phiz belongs to—"

"To Dave Dareall, your old shipmate!" exclaimed the Arab leader, grasping the old man's hand with a grip that made even him wince.

"Dave Dareall! The Lord be thanked!" cried the old fellow, joyfully. "The very chap as we're scourin' the desert fer. Look here, Dave, do you reckonise this boy?" He pointed to Dick, who was looking on with a face full of mingled hope and joy.

A moment's look, in which varied lines of feeling crossed his face, and then the stranger cried out:

"Have I not seen that face before? Who is the lad?"

"It's my daddy! my own daddy!" cried the boy, springing impulsively forward. "I'm Dick Dareall! I'm yer own boy, as has come out among the wild Arabs to find you."

In a moment his arms were around his father's form, and he was hugging him with all a boy's impulsive energy, while tears of joy rolled from his eyes.

"My boy! Can it be?" said the father, returning the embrace, while his eyes read with warm glances the remembered lineaments of the boy.

"You kin bet high on that," cried old Bob, in delight. "It's yer own boy, and no mistake, as you left behind when you took that last trip on the Sumter. The lad crossed the sea to hunt fur you. We've been through the Egyptian war, and we was put on your track by Bill Short, a sailor as was wrecked by you."

"So he was," answered the grizzled man, holding the boy out at arm's length, and reading his face with delight. "It is indeed my boy. And your mother! Tell me of your mother."

"She has been dead for years," answered Dick, in a mournful tone.

"I feared so. I feared so," answered the father, gravely. "Years, long years, have passed since I have seen a civilized face."

"But how come you here, at the head of the Arab troop?" asked Bob.

"I am in the service of the ruler of Nedjid," answered the other. "I was a slave in his hands at first, but I have made my way to the position of captain in his troops."

"You were jist in time to save us," exclaimed Bob. "That old sheik meant bizness. I ain't quite sure I'm alive yit."

"We ambushed the villains," answered Dave. "I was out with my troop scouring the desert in search of Bedouin robbers, who have been making trouble among the caravans lately. We were met by Selim al Nassib, who told us of your peril, and led us to the halting-place of the Bedouins. I dismounted some of my men, and bade them creep up the ridge. By good fortune they were just in time to fire on the murderous wretches. Thank Heaven that they were in time! I knew from Selim that you were Americans; but did not dream that it was my own old shipmate and my son that were in such deadly peril."

He clasped again old Bob's horny hand, and pressed the boy to his breast, with the warmth of a long-checked affection.

The conversation that ensued was broken by the return of the troop, with cries of triumph. They had been completely successful, and every soul of the desert robbers had bit the sands.

Night was falling when the troop again took up its line of march across the desert. At its head rode the soldierly leader, and by his side his son and friend, mounted again on the horses of the Nagib.

"My service in Arabia is done," said the Arab captain. "I had thought to spend the remnant of my life here. But the sight of your faces has made me thirst again for my old home in America."

"Will you be let off?" asked old Bob doubtfully. "Hadn't we best strike out for home now? We kin outride the best of these chaps."

"No," answered Dave, with a smile. "The Emir has treated me well. I will not act treacherously to him. I know that he will release me when he hears my story. And not empty-handed; he is generous to those who have served him well."

We must hurry to the conclusion of our tale. It proved to be as Dave Dareall had surmised.

The Emir of Nedjid, on learning of his meeting with his son and friend, released him from his service, though with great reluctance.

And he pressed on him such rich gifts in acknowledgment of his fidelity that the shipwrecked sailor returned home with an abundance for all his future needs.

What the future of our characters will be we cannot say. The events of this story are events of to-day, and Dave Dareall has just settled down with his son and his old shipmate in a cottage in the vicinity of New York.

THE END.

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